

THE MICHIANA AESTHETIC:
COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATION IN AN EMERGING POTTERY TRADITION

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For Thomas and Miles

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Meredith A.E. McGriff

THE MICHIANA AESTHETIC: COMMUNITY AND COLLABORATION IN AN EMERGING POTTERY TRADITION

Drawing on extensive ethnographic field research, this dissertation explores the professional lives of a group of potters in Michiana, an informal region centered around the border of northern Indiana and southern Michigan. It focuses on the emergence and ongoing development of a regionally specific pottery tradition, which has been built over the last twenty to thirty years by a growing group of potters, most of whom note that the presence of additional, likeminded potters is a major reason they choose to pursue their craft in this location. While previous material culture studies in folklore have often focused on tracing the social life of a certain type of object, this study looks at professional potters as an occupational group and considers the significance of developing a strong sense of community with others in the same profession. Much of the premise of this dissertation lies in the fact that presence matters; local places, personalized spaces, and face-to-face interactions are crucial to these potters in many ways, even when they do not work in the same studio together. These individual artists rely on numerous social connections: through a shared history, religion, and/or lifestyle preferences; through communal educational spaces and the development of vocational habitus; through the collaborative process of wood firing and liminal experiences; through the objects they exchange, collect, and hold dear. The included chapters each illuminate one of these social connections that is of benefit, and reveals how each aspect has played a role in the development of a sense of community among the potters who share a vocation in Michiana. Throughout the text, embodied experiences such as sense of space, physicality of the work, and the tactile experience of pottery play a key role in the potters' shared understanding of their work. As a whole, this study suggests a structured approach for the ethnographic study of the social lives of contemporary artists and demonstrates the importance of acknowledging the everyday interpersonal and embodied connections that influence an individual artist.

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Chapter I

Making Connections

I once heard serendipity described as “the joy of hitting a target you didn’t know you were aiming for” – hopefully one day someone will point me to the source of this apt description. Certainly it is one I can relate to, as my work has had many such moments over the years. I did not set out to study wood-fired pottery, nor did I plan to focus my research in the American Midwest. But I was born and raised in Indiana, and enjoyed playing with clay as a child, and a number of chance meetings and unexpectedly helpful connections have led me to my current circumstances and the completion of this dissertation. Before getting into the substantive methodological and theoretical introduction to this work, I feel it is important to give some background as to my own positionality within the worlds of ceramics and folklore, particularly regarding how I found my way to Michiana.

I first learned of Dick Lehman’s pottery nearly twenty years ago, when I was preparing to travel to Japan as a high school exchange student. By that point in my life I had a little experience with ceramics and certainly some enthusiasm for making art, but my knowledge of the “big names” in American pottery was essentially nonexistent. Dick’s son Scott Lehman was also participating on that trip to Japan, and Scott and I became good friends through the course of our travels, even staying in touch for a few years afterwards. I can vaguely recall meeting Dick at one of the orientation meetings in preparation for our trip, and I remember learning that he was a potter and had connections to Japanese potters. I had recently spent some time using clay and certainly enjoyed it, so I was intrigued to learn of his profession. The memory of that encounter stayed with me, even as I eventually lost touch with Scott, and our journey to Japan became a more distant – yet very fond – memory. I subsequently remember



Figure 1.1 - Part of the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park facility. September 2008.

hearing Dick Lehman's name at various points throughout the years, from other potters at art fairs, from my teachers in ceramics, and so on, but it was not until much later that I would realize the serendipitous connection we had made.

In the intervening years between high school and graduate school, I became more and more enthusiastic about pottery, learned to fire pots in the Japanese and American styles of raku, completed a B.F.A. in ceramics, and toyed with the idea of becoming a full-time artist, participating in art fairs and occasional juried shows. About a year after graduating from Ball State University I spent a month making pots at the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park¹ in Japan (Fig. 1.1), a further bit of serendipity; I would later

¹ *Toge no Mori*, in Japanese.

learn that one of Dick's good friends is a wood-firing potter in the town of Shigaraki, where Dick has visited, and Merrill Krabil, Goshen College's current ceramics professor, had worked as an artist-in-residence at Shigaraki during nearly the same timeframe as I. Though I had an enthusiastic beginning to my ceramics career in my 20s, and I still make and sell pottery and sculpture on occasion, these days I find my interest in ceramics is more of an academic one. I entered graduate school intending to analyze the cross-cultural contexts of raku, since it had been for many years my own focus within the world of ceramics. When I finally began the project of interviewing Indiana potters in early 2012, I was working on my M.A. in Folklore at Indiana University, and I (like many beginning ethnographers before me) had little idea where such a project could lead. But fate took its course and I soon reconnected with Scott and Dick Lehman, beginning new friendships after so many years and unknowingly starting down the path to the dissertation that lies before you now.

As a folklorist, the bulk of my research thus far has been conducted in collaboration with Traditional Arts Indiana (T.A.I.), an organization committed to "expanding public awareness of Indiana's traditional practices and nurturing a sense of pride among Indiana's traditional artists," which they accomplish through documentation, archival work, and public programming (Traditional Arts Indiana). My role as a fieldworker for T.A.I. has been predominantly on a project I have titled the "Indiana Potters Survey," which involves surveying contemporary professional potters and pottery ateliers around the state of Indiana. The project began as a practicum, developed after conversations with director Jon Kay about my desire to possibly work in public folklore someday, and my existing knowledge of ceramics. He thus suggested I might find some way to work with current potters in the state – little did I know what an extensive and rewarding endeavor that would turn out to be. Over the last four years, since early 2012, my fieldwork and documentation for the Indiana Potters Survey has involved recording audio interviews, as well as photographing the artists, studio spaces, processes used, and completed artwork. To date, I have interviewed about twenty potters around the state of Indiana, many of whom live in the

Michiana area and will appear in the following chapters.² My focus has primarily been on production potters, by which I mean potters who create functional pottery in large quantities, who usually work full time as a potter, and who are generally creating wares that are thrown on the wheel and glazed and fired in such a way as to be useful in the serving, consuming, or preservation of food. Vases and garden wares, as well as the production of decorative tiles, would also fit into this category.³

My first introduction to the potters of Michiana came in early in my fieldwork, when I interviewed Tom Unzicker, a former resident of Goshen and graduate of both Goshen College and Indiana University, for the Potters Survey. At the time of our interview in April of 2012, Tom Unzicker and his brother Jeff were the proprietors of Unzicker Bros. Pottery in Thornton, Indiana, where they made and sold large wood-fired vessels. During our interview, Tom mentioned having worked with Dick Lehman and Mark Goertzen in Goshen, Indiana. Hearing such a familiar name, I could not pass up the opportunity to reconnect with old friends, so I contacted Dick, Scott, as well as Dick's former apprentice Mark Goertzen (who now owns and runs Dick's former studio in Goshen), to arrange a visit. In August 2012, I travelled to Goshen to interview both Dick and Mark for the TAI project; both welcomed me graciously into their studios and spoke quite enthusiastically about their work in clay. As it turned out, my visit was timed quite serendipitously; the very first Michiana Pottery Tour would be held the following month, and I learned about it just in time to plan a return trip. Both Mark and Dick had a hand in planning the Tour, and both strongly recommended that I come back at the end of September to experience it. Thus I returned, spent a wonderful day visiting the many potters who were participating,

² Michiana is an informal region centered around the border of northern Indiana and southern Michigan, which will be more thoroughly defined at the beginning of chapter 2.

³ This does not necessarily exclude potters who make sculptural or decorative items. In vernacular terms, potters often describe their work as being either "functional" or "non-functional" (sometimes "decorative"), yet this is a fuzzy distinction and most potters do not see it as being in any way an insurmountable boundary. Indeed, most contemporary potters have a tendency to at least occasionally produce works that fit into both categories.



Figure 1.2 - Scott and Dick Lehman, just after unloading Mark Goertzen's kiln. July 2013.

and soon began to realize the extent of the pottery community within this region. On the eight stops along this first tour, I encountered potter after potter creating beautiful wood-fired pottery (and many who worked with other firing techniques, as well). Afterwards, it occurred to me that there were an astonishing number of potters working full time in this area, and yet so few people outside of the world

of contemporary American pottery (and indeed, few within it) seemed to realize that such a cohesive group existed in northern Indiana; as a long-time resident of Indiana and ceramic artist myself, I was astonished I had never heard mention of the extent of this ceramics-oriented community. I was intrigued, to say the least, and thus returned time and again to Michiana to interview more of the potters, to learn about their stories and their art. Admittedly, I began to neglect my larger survey of Indiana potters in favor of learning more about those in this specific area.

The Michiana tradition of pottery is a relatively recent establishment, which can be traced back to Marvin Bartel's arrival at Goshen College in 1970, where he began teaching. His former students now comprise a substantial portion of the group, many of whom have also been Dick Lehman's apprentices.



Figure 1.3 - Marvin Bartel photographs some of the Michiana potters at work unloading a kiln. July 2013.

When I refer in the title of this dissertation to an “emerging tradition,” I am pointing to the recent development of this group. While many of the Michiana potters have similar historical influences (which I address in a later section of this chapter), most of the ways they define themselves as a group refer to local developments over the past thirty years or so. This stands in contrast to other locales where families of potters are working with many of the same materials, methods, and aesthetics as the many generations of masters who came before them.⁴ And, while the Michiana tradition has roots in many far flung locations and historical moments, it has a relatively new sense of stability for its participants. Given that there were no production potters known to be working in the Goshen area when Marvin Bartel arrived, and the fact that the number of potters in the area has grown so quickly, I feel confident in identifying this as not just a new locus of pottery production, but also a cohesive and vibrant ceramic movement. This is further demonstrated by the establishment and subsequent growth of the Michiana Pottery Tour; since 2012 it has become an annual tradition itself and an important part of the Michiana potters’ yearly cycle of pottery sales. At one point quite recently I counted seven production potters in the Michiana region working full time and supporting themselves through the sales of pottery.⁵ In addition to these professionals, there are many more whom I would call “pottery adjacent full-time” – three who teach ceramics at the college level (and another who is retired from that profession), at least three who teach high school art with a focus on ceramics, the owner of a recently established ceramics supply company, and a potter who also makes and sells custom brushes made of natural materials and wooden pottery tools – all of whom I will introduce in the following chapters. Adding the dozen or more

⁴ For example, Raku Kichizaemon XV in Japan is the current, 15th generation Raku master in Kyoto, Japan.

⁵ This figure has a tendency to change as some find they need to supplement their pottery income with other jobs, and/or as new potters move to the area to establish a full-time business. Nevertheless, I believe there have consistently been between five and eight full-time potters in Michiana over the last five or more years.

residents who routinely work in clay part-time or count it as a primary hobby, one finds there is a dense network of thirty or more people who call themselves potters in Michiana.

After learning about this group and making numerous trips to Michiana over the course of a year, I curated an exhibit at the Mathers Museum of World Cultures in Bloomington, Indiana, called “Melted Ash: Michiana Wood Fired Pottery.” This exhibit, which opened in August and closed in December of 2013, featured a hands-on, mock potter’s studio which illustrated pottery-making processes, a full-scale model of the front of a wood fired kiln (Fig. 1.4), written and pictorial descriptions of the wood firing process, and a display of pottery from four of the full-time production potters in Michiana (Dick Lehman, Mark Goertzen, Todd Pletcher, and Justin Rothshank) whom I had identified as being central to the tradition. An additional and rather unique aspect of the exhibit was the inclusion of an area where visitors were given the opportunity to physically pick up and engage with hand-made functional pots. The tangible exhibit at the Mathers Museum was also accompanied by a corresponding online exhibit through the Traditional Arts Indiana digital archive, titled “Beyond Melted Ash,” which also focused on the Michiana wood firing tradition.

Furthermore, in conjunction with these two exhibits, I organized “Stoking the Fire: A Contemporary Pottery Symposium,” a one-day event which brought together potters, students, and scholars from around the Midwest to engage in conversations about clay as a medium, the wood firing process, and the significant human connections which are made through creating pots. A wide range of topics were covered, including personal commentaries about experiences making pottery, international encounters, experiences with different kinds of ceramics-oriented communities, the collaborative nature of wood firing, and a overviews of a few regional pottery traditions outside of Michiana. While I originally envisioned the symposium would appeal to primarily Indiana potters and/or those within a relatively short driving distance from Bloomington, Indiana, I was pleased that many Michiana potters



Figure 1.4 - Kiln model from the Mathers Museum of World Cultures exhibit, "Melted Ash: Michiana Wood Fired Pottery." 2013.

were able to participate, and I was quite surprised to receive a panel proposal that included Keith Ekstam, Professor of Art and Design at Missouri State University, and Dale Huffman, Professor of Art and Chair of the Art Department at Carlow University, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, along with two potters (Dick Lehman and Zach Tate) from the Michiana area. Both Keith and Dale are close friends with potters in Michiana, and have collaborated with them on numerous wood firings over the years, and both of

them brought a group of students to attend the symposium. As the primary organizer of the event as well as the exhibit curator, I was very glad to have the opportunity to bring together so many pottery enthusiasts from around the Midwest; overall, the experience fueled my desire to continue my research in the Michiana area, and to further explore the sense of community developed among potters.

The following chapters concern my research with these Michiana potters, which continued for over two years beyond the exhibits and symposium in 2013. Over that time, I was engaged in tracing the development of a thriving community of artisans and what Mark Goertzen has designated the “Michiana Aesthetic,” a set of ideal characteristics sought by many of the Michiana potters. In regards to wood firing results, the Michiana Aesthetic generally refers to a preference for heavy natural wood ash deposits, glossy glaze surfaces, and a tendency to cooler rather than warmer colors. However, as I explain in chapter four, additional aesthetic elements also tend to show up even in work that is not wood fired, including dripping or layered glazes, and a tendency to use forms and decorative effects the potters have borrowed from one another through working together. Going beyond the visual, however, I have framed this dissertation around the Michiana Aesthetic because the term also functions as a signifier of community; seeking similar visual elements in their pottery is a bonding point around which potters can (and often do) gather. This is particularly clear when they come together to fire a wood kiln that contains pieces made by many potters, sharing in the work while working toward similar wood fired effects on all of their pots. However, while Mark and Dick and others in the group have primarily used the Michiana Aesthetic as an indicator of these effects found on their pottery, I am expanding the term here to encompass much broader aesthetic values, including ways of living, preferences in modes of display, and shared values and dispositions in their everyday lives.

In this aesthetic movement in Michiana, process and community are inextricably linked, as each supports the other. The presence of strong mentors (in the local schools, ateliers, and clay guild) instills

an enthusiasm for pottery and allows for the training of new generations of potters; at the same time, the availability of energetic apprentices allows production potters to make and sell more work, and passionate students make a teachers' job more enjoyable. Successful wood firing is dependent upon a dedicated group of potters to care for the kiln, and when coming together around the kiln, friendships are strengthened, resulting in the mutual desire to fire again, to have another opportunity to enjoy the company of other potters and together improve upon the process. On and on, each circumstance begets the other, and the shared philosophies and similar aesthetic preferences discussed in this dissertation can be in large part understood as the result of these interactions; some intentional, and some serendipitous like my own.

Some Comments on the Value of Ethnographic Fieldwork

Before I begin a more detailed discussion of my methods, it is worthwhile to note that pottery alone can be a tremendously powerful method of communication, and is valued as such within many societies. The thoughts of the potter are, in a way, inscribed in the form and surface of the pot, yet there is a necessity to bring these features into text in order to make the pot relevant to the academic world. Additionally, much dialogue and activity occurs around the creation of the pot; this is as much my concern as the objects themselves, if not more so. "In a very real sense the song does not exist without the singer and the singing" in the same way a pot does not exist without the potter to create it (Cashman, Mould and Shukla 2011, 4). And, as David Shorter notes, "As a scholar, I'll have to take this live talk and turn it into text... how do I relate what I have sensed? In these cases, translation is literally transformation. I do not tell, dance, or sing Yoeme history as most Yoemem do. Rather, I write about how Yoemem understand and share their history in active, embodied, religious ways" (Shorter 2009, 3). In my own work I am not translating dance or language, I am translating the experience of making pottery, in that I must strive to explain an embodied experience to readers who likely have not had such

an experience. But unlike dance, pottery has an inherent physical permanence. It is, in fact, one of the most durable materials in the world, and because of this it is of primary interest in the archaeological record. The value of writing about pottery, then, is not necessarily in giving it more permanence or a place in historical records; written works can, however, assist in giving the act of making pottery a broader relevance to the discipline of folkloristics and similar areas of scholarship.

Additionally, a study of contemporary potters provides a useful counterpoint to the studies of “fine arts” such as painting and sculpture which make up so much of the art historical cannon today. While these elite works certainly have their place in our understanding of art through the ages, the artworks enshrined in private collections and public art museums often tell us only about the aesthetic preferences and social relationships of the wealthiest and most powerful people; they often tell us relatively little about the everyday lives of the middle or lower-class people who make up the majority of the world’s population. Warren Roberts, a great folklorist and scholar of material culture, indicated that there has been a tremendous problem “with the work of most of those who write about the way in which people used to live: Because many writers ignored the vast majority of the population, the nontypical five percent of the population is represented as typical,” leaving another ninety-five percent of the population either misrepresented or underrepresented in written works. Here, he is discussing the tendency of historians and museums to “assume that all people in the past lived in mansions or in large towns” (Roberts 1996, viii-ix). However, the problem is broader and particularly insidious in art historical scholarship. With this in mind, I certainly count myself within the line of scholars whose stated goal is to give credit to the ingenuity of a broad spectrum of people and to expand the historical record to embrace those who may not previously have been included. Chapter five in particular addresses ways that more potters’ voices can be included in museum collections, and more importantly, the benefits museums can realize from expanding their collections and records through collaborations with artist-collectors.

Contemporary American potters fit well within the category of those in need of further documentation; while some potters have reached an elite status within the world of American ceramics, potters are rarely wealthy and even their greatest accomplishments are not always recognized in the fine art world. Recording their lives and works, therefore, not only gives us a more thorough written record regarding the provenance of specific pots, but it can also help us to record and understand the work of a greater number of contemporary creators. By examining their everyday lives and the artwork they produce (alongside a study of the products of others which they choose to collect), we can reach a much deeper understanding of their values, their social networks, and their creative processes. As folklorist Henry Glassie has said, "Our first task is to understand artists in terms of their own norms of creativity" (1995, 246). In this regard, working with contemporary, living potters is particularly useful because they are available to speak directly to the value of their art in their everyday lives; if we wish to know whether these pots represent aesthetic ideals, friendships, artistic kinship, and so on, we need only to ask.

Additionally, it is important to state that although I am quite attuned to the critical role of individual artists in making creative choices and taking most of the responsibility for the creation of individual works of art, my fieldwork has been focused on the means by which these individuals come together to create a sense of community. Some other scholars, particularly in the folk arts realm, have found it quite useful to study just one individual and their artistic creations, often focusing on the informant's life history as a way to frame those creative outputs. Several folklorists, particularly those focusing on material culture and folk arts, have followed this model in recent decades.⁶ Although I agree that a focus on one individual can lend great depth to an ethnography, it can have the limitation of only

⁶ See, for example: Chittenden (1995), Evans (1998), Jones (1989), Kitchener (1994), Kim (1995), and Vlatch (1992), all of whom have profiled individual artists and have provided great insights into the value of the art to both the individual and to that person's community.

presenting one person's experiences of a society or group. Instead, by collecting insights from a number of individuals, I am able to merge their perspectives in my writing in order to exemplify the broader group. This approach has been taken previously by other folklorists, and provides a substantial influence on my writing today. Of particular note are pivotal publications such as *The Grace of Four Moons* by Pravina Shukla (2008), and many books that document longstanding pottery traditions in the United States.⁷ These models have been a constant consideration during my fieldwork in Michiana; with these examples in mind I have attempted to gather enough information to allow me, in the text that follows, to highlight multiple individuals who play a variety of roles within the Michiana pottery community.

Participant observation is also an important consideration in my fieldwork, particularly when it comes to developing an understanding of embodied experiences. Many scholars have noted the benefits of participating in an activity alongside their informants, and they explain the many insights they have gained through a shared sensual experience. Deirdre Sklar's article in *the Journal of American Folklore* issue titled "Bodylore," for example, describes two different instances when her own physical participation in religious events, alongside her informants, allowed her to gain deeper insights into cultural practices (1994). My fieldwork thus far has already indicated a similar benefit to a participatory approach. My first direct experience with the wood firing process used in the Michiana area occurred during a fieldwork trip in the summer of 2013. Although I was inclined at first to stay at a safe distance (and behind my camera), I was constantly encouraged by the potters to take part in stoking the fire. In the wood firing process, the temperature in the kiln reaches 2200° Fahrenheit or higher, and when the door of the kiln is opened these extraordinarily hot flames rush out toward the potters who step up to toss in the wood that fuels the fire. Though they dress in protective gear (including long sleeved shirts,

⁷ Including Burrison (2008), Burrison (2010), Mecham (2009), and Zug (1986).

thick leather gloves, and glasses), the potters who stoke are subjected to intense heat and often find they can only stand at the door stoking the fire for very brief periods of time before feeling as though they are risking bodily harm. While I had a logical, academic understanding of this experience, it was not until I was invited to step up to the kiln and feed the fire myself that I truly understood the intensity of this experience - hearing the rush of the flames and the crackle of the wood, feeling the intense heat on my face, experiencing my own struggle as I felt a physical need to step away from the heat - while on the other hand still very much aware that I needed to complete my duty to feed the fire.

Having this first-hand familiarity allowed me to turn to my own embodied experience as I developed various lines of inquiry with the potters, and continues to help me to understand their answers as I ask them to explain their own somatic ways of knowing what is happening in a wood firing; many aspects of this are now elaborated in chapter four. A close parallel can also be found in Dorothy Noyes' experience of the Patum, where full participation was crucial to her incorporation into the group: "My attitude – of body and thus for them also of mind – revealed my distance from the event, so they forced me into intimacy with it... I came to understand the techniques of incorporation as reciprocal: the individual is brought into the Patum, and the Patum is taken into the individual. One's change of attitude is then literal and visible to others" (Noyes 2003, 136). Similarly, as my participation affords me membership into the group, it lends credence – from the potters' perspective, and from that of my readers, I hope – to my ability to comprehend and interpret their activities.

With the above fieldwork considerations in mind, I believe the length and depth of my study allows me to present here the fullest possible picture of the Michiana pottery community, particularly the collaborative nature of some of their work, and the ways that having a strong occupational group present in the area furthers creativity in these artists' lives. As a point of departure, it is worthy of note that until this point, trends in publications about contemporary wood fired pottery have neglected many

of these considerations, and have often fallen into two general categories. First, there are many textbooks and articles discussing wood firing techniques, primarily written by potters and intended to educate students of ceramics or fellow studio potters.⁸ Additionally, there are scholarly accounts, primarily from folklorists and students of material culture, which describe wood firing traditions as they have been transmitted in specific regions.⁹ While the historical work done by these scholars – for example, as John Burrison describes, “the task of reconstructing the lives and work of four hundred humble artisans who, for the most part, escaped the notice of chroniclers” (2008, xxxi-xxxii) – is crucial to broadening the historical record of ceramic traditions, it leaves much to be desired when one wishes to examine the social lives of contemporary ceramic artists.

In reviewing publications such as those described above, I believe there is not enough attention paid to horizontal transmission in the arts, nor to social aspects of everyday life which play a key role in artistic production. I suspect this is, to a certain degree, tied to the prestige of the individual artist in the fine arts world, a precedent which is difficult to move beyond when the artist at hand wishes to be seen as just such a prestigious individual (a worthy goal, certainly, with attendant financial and social benefits). However, in the work of folklorists I also suspect that this trend is tied to methodology in fieldwork, as I have oft been taught; fieldworkers are frequently advised to begin with life history. I have no argument with this method, and indeed I use it myself, but I will say that it is only a beginning and not a sufficient approach in itself.

My own opening line in an interview often falls along the lines of “How did you get started with ceramics?” because it gives me the opportunity to see how the artist views him or herself, before

⁸ For example, see *Ceramics Monthly* (2001), Minogue and Sanderson (2000), Rogers (2003), and Troy (1995).

⁹ Primary examples relevant to my own writing include those that document pottery traditions in the southern United States and Japan. See sources above in footnote 7, with the addition of Louise Allison Cort’s oft-cited *Shigaraki: Potters’ Valley*, which provides an in-depth look at a longstanding regional tradition in Japan (2001).

proceeding to more intimate details of life. The life-history approach and attention to tracing chronology is certainly crucial in under-documented arts, and is by no means a detriment to folklore scholarship; indeed, it has been a boon to scholars such as John Burrison, who provides us with a substantial documentation of the history of pottery in the southern United States, first in *Brothers in Clay: The Story of Georgia Folk Pottery* (2008) and later in *From Mud to Jug: The Folk Potters and Pottery of Northeast Georgia* (2010). And, Burrison does make note of certain social gatherings that have happened around the creation of pottery; for example, he describes how friends and neighbors would often gather at the potter's residence for a meal and games during a firing (2008, 10-12). In his later book, he notes that potters do visit one another, participate in shows and festivals together, and feel "a sense of occupational kinship" with one another (2010, 95-96). However, in both cases, he does little to elaborate on these social connections.

Certainly there is much more to the pursuit of a thorough ethnography than just life history, and when we have the opportunity to document artists at work in the present, it is worthwhile to pay attention to not just their work and their process, but also the social interactions which are a critical part of their everyday lives. Furthermore, I believe this approach is particularly critical when working in a tradition that is not family-oriented, and therefore social influences are perhaps not so easily traced. While family members are involved in the artists' work, the Michiana tradition is not one which has usually been transmitted from parent to child, as has often been the case in other folkloristic studies of pottery traditions in the United States. Given that it is a relatively new establishment, it is certainly possible that we will one day see second- or third-generation Michiana potters; indeed, many children and other relatives of the Michiana potters have expressed an interest in clay, and have dabbled in their own ceramic creations, though they have not become full-time potters themselves. However, for the present, other modes of transmission are much more prevalent, and discussions of ceramic methods and challenges seem to be primarily with peers or mentors rather than with family members.

It is my hope that my integration into this community, with numerous visits and conversations over the course of nearly four years, has afforded me a deep enough understanding of the complex social relationships of mentors and mentees, colleagues and friends within this group that I will be able to represent them with accuracy in this text. I can certainly thank my own background as a potter (and the wonderful teachers and mentors I have had over the years) for my easy entry into this group; my knowledge of ceramic techniques and technologies was a major boon and allowed me to orient myself to the work of the Michiana potters quite quickly. This stands in contrast to the experience of John Burrison, for example, who recounts a comical tale of his own adventures attempting to learn to throw pots on the potter's wheel (2010, xviii-xx). So, while I do consider myself a potter, and I would certainly recommend to others doing fieldwork that they should cultivate a first-hand understanding of the processes they are attempting to write about, I also want to make clear that I am not personally in the business of making Michiana pots. However, with my hands out of the clay, I can do the work of a folklorist, busying myself with a camera and notebook. Here I will echo Henry Glassie in saying, "The challenge was to learn enough to write with confidence," (2010, 6). In that regard, I owe many thanks to all of the potters who have sat with me through long hours of interviews and observations, who have graciously invited me to join them at their studios, their homes, and around their kilns.

Historical and International Contexts

Ceramics is by no means a new art form; in fact, it is often said to be one of the oldest crafts in the world. Used in nearly every society around the world for thousands of years, it was a substantial aspect of the foodways of many people before also becoming an integral part of the contemporary art scene. Indeed, there are more styles and techniques used in pottery today (and throughout history) than can be succinctly covered in this short introduction. However, certain points of historical context are

necessary for understanding the position of wood-fired ceramics within contemporary American ceramics, as well as the strong Japanese influence that can be observed in Michiana today.

First, precisely what do I mean when I refer to wood firing and wood-fired pottery? Wood has been used for fuel as long as any other resource, and countless pots throughout history have been fired using wood; this dissertation is not meant to speak to every occurrence of this. Instead, I am referencing contemporary *long* wood firing, which is particular in both its technical details and the results that it can produce. As a point of reference, readers should be aware that stoneware pottery is often fired in less than a day using gas or electric kilns. The right wood kiln can also be brought up to the necessary temperature (around 2200-2400° F), in about twelve hours.¹⁰ However, such a quick firing in a wood kiln does not allow for very much of the wood ash from the fire to fall on the pots, and for many potters, attaining a natural wood ash glaze is the primary appeal of pursuing wood firing – yes, burned wood can quite literally become glaze, which is essentially glass (this is a constant source of astonishment for the uninitiated). The chemistry that creates such a transformation is complex, but suffice to say, wood contains certain minerals, and at such high temperatures the ash from the burning wood containing those minerals will fly through the kiln (hence the term “fly ash”), stick to the pots, and combine with molecules on the surface of the clay. As the wood ash is allowed to build up over time, it will often run down the sides of the pot, completely coating the pot in this natural and unpredictable glaze. Then, as the kiln cools, the melted ash will solidify into a glassy glaze surface, which is referred to as natural wood

¹⁰ The times and temperatures given here are estimates only, and are provided to assist a non-expert audience in understanding this process. The concept of “heat work” – meaning that the chemical effects achieved in the kiln result from a combination of temperature and how long that temperature is held – is crucial for a more specialized understanding of the process. It is because of this combination of both time and temperature that the potters often use cones (small implements which are made of the same materials as clay and glaze, and designed to be placed in the kiln and melt at certain intervals) – to judge the progress of the kiln, rather than just looking at the temperature displayed on the pyrometer.

ash glaze. A long wood firing is thus necessary to allow sufficient ash buildup – firings may last anywhere from three days to over a week (even up to two weeks).

Additionally crucial for understanding the social significance of this process is the fact that, in order to maintain such high temperatures, the intense fire is constantly consuming huge amounts of wood. This requires that the potters “stoke,” meaning they add small amounts of wood to the kiln, as often as every 10-15 minutes, all day, every day during the firing. Therefore, it is necessary for potters to work together, often taking shifts of 4-6 hours each, since the kiln must be attended at all times during the firing. Wood firing is thus no easy job, and it often leaves everyone involved physically exhausted, yet creatively reinvigorated. Most importantly, while each potter makes unique styles of pots, it is their collaboration at the kiln that allows them to pursue wood firing: building kilns is easier and firing more often and for longer periods of time is less exhausting when the work is shared amongst multiple people. Additionally, by sharing their skills and knowledge about the process, each person is able to learn from the experience of others to produce better pottery and refine their individual style. Coming together at the firing contrasts with many of the potters’ everyday experiences of working alone in the studio, and it allows time for socializing while stoking, bringing them closer together as friends and providing time for the exchange of ideas. These many aspects combine to define a process that is generally more successful and enjoyable when it is collaborative; this is the premise of chapter four, which explores the development of wood firing in Michiana, and the collaborative and liminal aspects of this process.

In addition to understanding the basics of the process of wood firing, it is also important to know that this process was heavily influenced by longstanding traditions of wood firing in Japan; the kilns used by many American potters are based on Japanese designs, and many of the aesthetics pursued through wood firing have been inspired by Japanese pots. This, along with other international

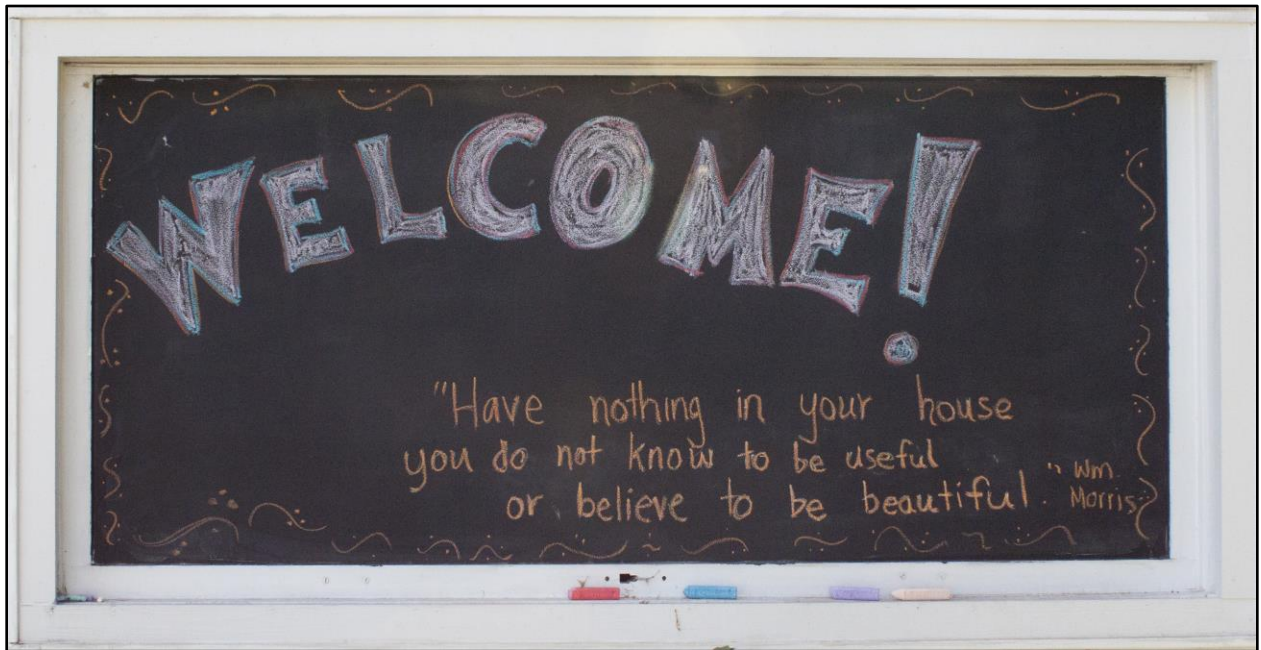


Figure 1.5 - Chalkboard sign included in Todd Pletcher's display at the Michiana Pottery Tour in 2013. The quote reads, "Have nothing in your house you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful." - Wm. Morris"

connections, have been major influences on the trajectory of contemporary American ceramics, and in order to explain the Michiana tradition it is necessary to paint a broader picture of the historical movements that preceded it. Two artistic movements since the late 19th century have been of particular influence: first, William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement in England, which influenced Yanagi Soetsu, the founder of the Japanese *mingei* (folk crafts or folk arts) movement. Both of these major developments still echo in the world of American ceramics today (Fig. 1.5).

William Morris was a prolific writer and designer, and is well known for his influence upon the Arts and Crafts Movement in England (and, quickly thereafter, beyond). In reaction to the Industrial Revolution, he promoted the integration of design and production, the use of natural materials, and the

beauty of designs based upon natural themes. The American engagement with the Arts and Crafts movement is well summarized by Charles Zug in *Turners and Burners: The Folk Potters of North Carolina*: “Behind the specific admiration for oriental ceramics lay the general philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement, which had originated in England during the third quarter of the nineteenth century and spread to the United States by the 1890s. Speaking out against the dehumanizing tendencies an ever-enlarging industrial system, adherents like John Ruskin proclaimed the dignity of ‘handiwork’... And in order to escape the debilitating effects of mass production and specialization, English artists looked back beyond the Industrial Revolution,” turning to the middle ages for inspiration. “America, unfortunately, lacked a medieval past,” so some turned to Native American imagery or wares, while others looked to their European heritage, or living folk pottery traditions (Zug 1986, 410-411).

Subsequently in Japan, Soetsu Yanagi developed the *mingei* movement along similar lines, a movement which would also have strong influences on American pottery. As his good friend, potter Bernard Leach, has said:

It would not be entirely amiss to describe Yanagi’s position in Japan as relatively comparable to that of Ruskin and Morris in England. In both cases a deep and comprehensive statement was made regarding work and the qualification of work by beauty, against a background of rapid industrialization. In each case the creative thought behind the resulting movements, separated as they are by approximately one hundred years, may be regarded as counter Industrial revolutions. Morris and his followers felt that there was no genuine heartbeat left in work and so they set out to print and weave and decorate with their own hands... Fundamentally, human beings, whether Eastern or Western, need belief, free play of imagination and intuition in their homes and workshops or they become starved. All the cog-wheels and electronic brains cannot assuage these human needs in the long run... Basically this is not so much a revolution against science and the machine as a seeking of a means of counterbalance by employing man’s first tools, his own hands, for the expression of his inner nature. (Leach 2013, 90-91)

Mingei objects needed basis in utilitarian purpose, to be made of locally available natural materials, and made in large numbers. Yanagi and his followers believed in the ideal of the “unknown craftsman,” a selfless creator whose skill was born out of the cumulative knowledge of generations of unknown artists, a person with no particular artistic intent, who focused on the good of the community rather than sales benefitting only himself. These philosophical ideals also gave way to aesthetic ideals, based a great deal on Korean ceramics and Japanese folk crafts; the emphasis was on simplicity and rustic beauty (Moeran 1981). These ideals were quite subjective, based in intuition, and yet the objects that Yanagi collected and praised have had a tremendous influence on the trajectory of ceramic productions.

Two very close friends of Yanagi, Bernard Leach and Shoji Hamada, were particularly influential in spreading mingei ideals within American ceramics through their extensive writing, travels, workshops, exhibits, and so on. And, as Mark Hewitt and Nancy Sweezy have lamented:

One of the many results of Leach’s proselytizing about the beauty of other ceramics was that contemporary American potters in the 1960s and 1970s who had an interest in functional pots bypassed American vernacular traditional pottery... and looked with Leach to the East for inspiration and technical knowledge. Models of the very types of pots that Leach so admired in Japan and elsewhere in Asia were already in America’s own backyard, but were consequently largely ignored by contemporary potters. (2005, 167)

This does not, of course, mean that American potters were trying to make Japanese (or more broadly, Asian), pots. As Nancy Sweezy describes in regards to southern pottery, “Although a potter may have been inspired by the shape of an Asian storage jar, his turning habits, his clay and glazes from local sources, resulted in a unique interpretation and not a replica” (1994, 26). Even those who do not dig their own clay in their backyards were likely to find North American clay and glaze sources to be both more cost-effective and more familiar. I would add, as well, that consumers play a role in these unique interpretations; different lifestyles necessitate different kinds of implements, and when a potter’s main

source of income is from functional ware it can be awfully difficult, for example, to convince someone who does not participate in the Japanese tea ceremony that a tea bowl is a useful object.

It is also important to note that the Asian influence on American pottery is not just an historical one; it is very much a contemporary link, as well. Studying abroad has become a mainstay of the ideal American collegiate experience (not to mention middle or high school programs that are becoming ever more prevalent, as well).¹¹ Furthermore, many aspiring artists – potters included – are encouraged to pursue international experiences, often through artist-in-residence programs. There are clearly socio-economic factors at play in whether or not such an opportunity is feasible for an artist to pursue, and many artists must rely upon family support or grant monies (or some combination thereof) if they are to pursue such opportunities. Still, many students and aspiring potters do find ways to go abroad, and when they do, they are likely to be drawn to those locations that have a longstanding and well-known ceramics traditions. Japan, of course, ranks high on such a list, but vast numbers of other opportunities exist around Europe and Asia. For the potters of Michiana, two programs in Japan have been of particular interest: *Toge no Mori* (also known as the Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park) in Shigaraki, Japan, and the International Workshop of Ceramic Art in Tokoname (more commonly known by its acronym, IWCAT) in Tokoname, Japan. Although IWCAT is no longer in operation, both programs have hosted hundreds of ceramic artists – both emerging and well-established – from dozens of different countries over the years.

¹¹ While the 2014 Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange published yearly by the Institute of International Education (IIE) indicates that fewer than 10 percent of all U.S. college students study abroad at some point in their undergraduate education, top public institutions boast upwards of a 40% participation rate in study abroad and some private institutions have over 80% participation (Institute of International Education 2014). Furthermore, in a 2012 poll commissioned by NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 63 percent of respondents indicated they believed international education was is ‘very essential’ or ‘moderately essential’ to the educational experience (NAFSA: Association of International Educators 2012).

It is a curious iniquity of the American fine art world that artists are simultaneously encouraged to seek out international experiences, and yet are often criticized for not being unique enough when they incorporate inspirations from those experiences into their work. Once we accept that one cannot make artwork without utilizing one's experiences of the world, we must also accept that international influences will likely be present in that artwork. For those participating in the novelty-focused contemporary art world, the trick, of course, is to incorporate those influences in a unique way; to bring together different elements to create a style of one's own, and not to directly copy the work of others. And yet, how many artists truly set out to copy the work of others? From my observations over the years, I would say it is very few. Even if it were the case that a potter were to attempt to directly copy the work of another, he would be doing so in different circumstances: his own studio, equipment, training, resources, and so on, which will almost always lead him to differing results. As Dick Lehman has so eloquently stated:

Is not tradition really the succession of solutions which, over eons, are accumulated and handed down to the next generations and not something static and final? Is not tradition as much our responsibility as our inheritance? If we each take the best of what has been passed down to us and apply it, with a healthy dose of curiosity and innovation, to the problems and limitations of our own lives, we all will be extending that tradition in the best possible ways. (1999, 21)

This articulate statement so closely parallels a key definition of tradition used in folkloristics: "tradition is the creation of the future out of the past" (Glassie 1995, 395). To say an artist or a potter is traditional is no insult; nor is it an indication that their work lacks individuality or creativity. It is simply an acknowledgement that they have learned of what has come before them, and they have made conscious choices about which aspects of this art they wish to carry forth in their own work.

Theoretical Approaches: Material Culture, Occupational Folklife, Art Worlds, and Networks

When I began this study, I intended to do so primarily using the tools available to me through material culture studies, particularly the methods set out by Henry Glassie. His model proposes a combination of approaches to the study of objects as a means of understanding the human beings who make and utilize them. He proposes following an object through its various contexts: primarily creation, communication, and consumption, which “cumulatively recapitulate the life history of the artifact” (1999, 48). His approach is a thorough means of following one particular type of object through a culture, leading one to understand, among many things: how and why an object is made in certain ways, using certain materials and technologies; what the object is intended to communicate, how, and whether it is successful in doing so to its audience; how the object is sold or exchanged, and how it is then utilized in everyday life or incorporated as part of a collection. History, geography, commerce, social connections and personal narratives all have their place in this conception of the study of material culture, and all of these aspects have played strong roles in my research and writing.

All this being said, I found myself stuck in one particular context: that of creation. I had a particular affinity for the creators of pottery, and a particular interest in their social lives, rather than the social lives of the objects they were creating. When I inquired into how they were selling their work, what they were trying to communicate and to whom, I found that the most interesting conversations on these topics were already happening among the potters themselves, much more prevalently than between themselves and any external audiences. Furthermore, they often seemed to find the most value in the input they could receive from others who shared their profession, others who faced similar challenges in the production and sales of their work, and in the philosophies that lie behind that work. I therefore turned to the study of occupational folklore, as I realized that the scholarly contribution I

could make here was much more about the study of an occupational group, and less so the study of the pottery itself (which is already rather well documented through the work of the potters).

Many studies of occupational folklore or folklife have begun with a group of people who identify as workers in a particular field, and have focused on the expressions of identity (often narrative or song) shared between existing members of that group. In many cases, those identities are expressed in relation to outside forces, including natural, social, economic, and political powers that affect the work or the lives of the workers.¹² For example, Timothy Tangherlini has written about the traditions of storytelling among paramedics, and describes how some stories can function as a means to express frustration with either difficult patients, or other professionals with whom they must coordinate such as firefighters, police, and hospital personnel (Tangherlini 1998). What happens, however, when the work done by a group is itself the main form of creative expression? Potters are rather different than the groups addressed by these studies of occupational folklore and folklife, many of whom were not artists or craftsmen, but instead coal miners, factory workers, and so on. In contrast, the potters' connections do not come from showing up for work at the same factory every day, or even from all working consistently in the same space together. It does not come from being together in a major labor-oriented political movement (though many of them do share similar political beliefs, and are politically and civically active). They are bound, primarily, by the shared challenges and joys found in their work, and they are further bound by their shared values and similar lifestyles, and much of their cohesiveness as a group comes from the fact that they choose to come together outside of the necessary context of the work that they do.

¹² Some of the best scholarship on occupational folklore or folklife studies can be found in the seminal issue of *Western Folklore* titled *Working Americans: Contemporary Approaches to Occupational Folklife* (1978). See, in particular, included articles by Robert H. Byington (185-198), Archie Green (213-244), and Robert S. McCarl, Jr. (145-160).

Many of the social aspects of artistic work that I wished to inquire into are encompassed by Howard Becker's notion of "art worlds," on which I have relied heavily. He considers art as activity, treats "art as not so very different from other kinds of work, and... people defined as artists as not so very different from other kinds of workers." Furthermore, Becker acknowledges that art involves the cooperative activity of a number of people, and that the artwork produced is necessarily affected (and thus will show signs of) those relationships. In his definition, an "art world" denotes "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joint knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is known for" ([1982] 2008, xxiii-xxiv). While Becker's conception of an art world is meant to include not just those who are considered artists, but others such as suppliers of materials, art dealers, consumers, and critics, I found great appeal in the aspects of his approach which focus on the necessary interactions between artists who are situated within the same art world. Becker's conceptualization is not so different from Glassie's; both impress upon us that we must consider all of the people and connections involved in the creation and consumption of art in order to achieve a full picture of the society the art exists within. Furthermore, the ways in which the Michiana potters have described their own work and social circles to me (which will be explored in detail in the following chapters) are quite similar to Becker's acknowledgement that an art world is without specific bounds and best conceptualized as a network:

Art worlds do not have boundaries around them, so that we can say that these people belong to a particular art world while those people do not. I am not concerned with drawing a line separating an art world from other parts of a society. Instead, we look for groups of people who cooperate to produce things that they, at least, call art; having found them, we look for other people who are also necessary to that production, gradually building up as complete a picture as we can of the entire cooperating network that radiates out from the work in question. The world exists in the cooperative activity of those people, not as a structure or organization, and we use words like these only as a shorthand for the notion of networks of people cooperating. ([1982] 2008, 35)

This kind of approach allows me to acknowledge Michiana as a regional tradition, but also as an art world that is broadly connected to other artists and movements through history and around the world. Furthermore, in elaborating upon his concept of art worlds, Becker offers many useful concepts in regards to the development of integrated professionals, the necessity of cooperative links between people (artists and others), and the benefits of cohesive aesthetics within an art world; all of these will be explored in detail in later chapters.

Becker's conception of an art world as a network is therefore a crucial one for my work. But how does this term interface with similar terms such as group and community? All of my main collaborators in this research have described a distinctly felt sense of community, both as a group of potters, and in a broader sense, as residents of Goshen and/or the Michiana region who share certain lifestyle preferences. Yet "community" is an ambiguous word, and I turn to Dorothy Noyes' consideration of the concepts of group and network to clarify what is meant by community. She states:

At bottom, folklorists have been interested in the group as the locus of culture and as the focus of identity. Our difficulties with such concepts as 'folk,' 'nation,' 'race,' and so on, may be seen as resulting from the confusion of the two... I will propose that we distinguish between the empirical network of interactions in which culture is created and moves, and the community of the social imaginary that occasionally emerges in performance. Our everyday word group might best serve as shorthand for the dialogue between the two. (1995, 452).

Accordingly, the sense of community felt and described by this group of potters is brought into being through their ongoing interactions. Furthermore, Noyes clarifies:

[T]he community is in no way independent of the network. The performance that constructs the community ideologically and emotionally also strengthens or changes the shape of networks by promoting interaction... The community exists as the project of a network or some of its members. Networks exist insofar as their ties are continually recreated and revitalized in interaction" (1995, 471-2).

Conceptualizing the Michiana pottery tradition as a social network (i.e. an ego-centric network of individuals) is therefore in many ways the most fitting approach. First, it allows for the exploration of many interpersonal connections of different kinds, primarily between the most active professional potters in the area, but also acknowledging the important connections they have with family, friends, suppliers, clients, mentors, students, and more. As an occupational network, it is dense at its center, where a tight-knit group of professional potters share the most connections, and looser around periphery, where part-time and hobby potters still participate in some of the same community-building activities. It is also, then, an easy step to perceive the Michiana tradition together as one node within the broader network of contemporary American potters; similarly, a network approach acknowledges that, while this is mostly a regionally-defined tradition, there are many broader connections that are also quite crucial to each individual potter and to the group as a whole, even if those connections are less physically present in their everyday lives.

The Study of Social Connections in a World of Individual Artists

Much of the premise of this dissertation lies in the fact that presence still matters. While the easy (often online) availability of information and social networking, the ability to travel far and wide and often, and other such globalizing tendencies are prevalent in contemporary society, it is also true that local places, personalized spaces, and face-to-face interactions are still crucial in many ways. My focus here is on the development of a regionally specific tradition, a group of potters who find the support of one another to be a major reason for pursuing their craft in a certain place. A group, a *community*, is found where there are people who share the same values, who take pleasure in the same activities, who find frustration in the same aspects of life, and where they are in dialogue with one another about these values and goals. That is not to say that things like social media, mobility, the availability of a very broad exchange of ideas in the world is not also quite critical in the lives of

contemporary makers; the potters I discuss here have a multitude of networks that they turn to, including broad networks of artists around the country whom they are familiar with and whose work they respect, networks of friends and family who live in other cities or states, networks of clients and collectors who have purchased their work. Yet when it comes to sharing resources, materials, equipment, when it is a matter of building and firing kilns together, when one appreciates sharing in a meal or a hobby or a meaningful conversation – in these crucial situations, those who are present in the same region are the most prevalent and are often the most important source of community feeling that an artist can have.

Individual artists rely on numerous social connections: through history, religion, and region, through education and informally learned habits of body and mind, through collaborative process and liminal space, through the objects they hold dear. The following chapters each illuminate a particular kind of social connection that is of benefit to these artists, and suggest approaches for the ethnographic study of contemporary artists.¹³ First, in chapter two, I look at the defining qualities of the Michiana region, particularly in terms of geography, religion, and economy, to see how it has developed and why it appeals to this group of potters. My focus is not on a detailed historical account (though certain historical aspects are important to attend to), but rather the importance of simultaneity, a convergence of numerous factors that have led to cohesion among these people and in this place. While the geography has been (and continues to be) important for the resources it provides, much of the appeal of this place lies in the people. A combination of shared religion and/or secular philosophies of life, a

¹³ I would also suggest that the approaches I have used to understanding the Michiana community could be used in the study of an historical group of artists; however, this may prove challenging when records are scarce and artists are no longer present to be able to comment on these topics.

similar approach to business and economics, and the ability to build deep connections with those who live in the same area are all key reasons that these artists choose to live and work in Michiana.

Chapter three then looks to see how people are brought into the occupation of pottery. Often in studies of folk art, family has been the answer, and little further inquiry has followed. You learned from your father/mother/etc. because they were present in your life, and that goes without question. And the craft would be shared with the next generation in much the same way. Yet often for contemporary potters, becoming part of this occupation is not a family matter: it is a matter of choosing an area of study or a career. And, in doing so, one also chooses which people to surround oneself with. This is an important choice, and the personalities and work situations that are present in early school or career situations can have a major impact on the identity development of an artist. Furthermore, it is worthy of note that folk art studies have often disregarded college and university learning environments because of their institutional nature; folklorists are by and large interested in the informal and the vernacular, rather than the formalized teaching offered in a collegiate setting. Unfortunately this approach can lead us to overlook important informal learning that occurs within institutional settings, not to mention additional learning and identity development that occurs after or outside of institutional education. Chapter three therefore focuses on the everyday influences which are often connected through a process of identity building and vocational habitus development that occurs in educational spaces.

While shared educational spaces are crucial, it is important to acknowledge that in their professional lives, potters tend to spend most of their time working individually. Therefore, it is necessary to look for the special settings and occasional events that do bring them together and afford them the time to build close bonds with one another. It became clear to me quite early in my fieldwork experiences in Michiana that wood firing was central to the identity and social cohesion of this group. Chapter four, therefore, is dedicated to investigating the development of this process within the

Michiana region and the benefits of striving for similar aesthetic results within a collaborative process. Furthermore, this chapter analyzes wood firing through the lens of liminal space, exploring the ways that this intense and uncertain process helps to develop a sense of empathy, community, and creativity among the participating potters.

Both chapters four and five are concerned with aesthetics, particularly how shared processes, moments of creativity and uncertainty, and a variety of encounters with the work of others can lead to recognizable aesthetic elements among a group of artists, each of whom still has their own unique style. Chapter four begins this discussion by defining the Michiana Aesthetic, and illuminating the ways that the collaborative wood firing process has influenced the development of this aesthetic – elements of which are, notably, present in more than just the wood-fired work produced by these potters. Then, in chapter five, I evaluate the presence of influence via collected objects; artists are often prolific collectors, and their collections offer ways for them to build social, professional, and aesthetic connections. This chapter also broadens the scope of this study to see how a wider network of artistic connections – particularly with artists from outside the Michiana region – can remain present in an artists' life through the objects that he or she possesses and utilizes.

There is no question, in the contemporary fine art world, that an artist can achieve tremendous recognition and artistic success as an individual; my question is, what does (s)he achieve through the myriad connections with other artists who are present in his life? For many potters in Michiana, the answer is success and satisfaction in one's work, the ability to pursue results that would not be possible without the help of others, a life that is pleasing in regards to not just occupation, but in family, friends, philosophy, and much more. "Where use meets beauty, where nature transforms into culture and individual and social goals are accomplished, where the human and numinous come into fusion, where objects are richest in value – there is the center of art," says Henry Glassie, regarding the study of

pottery (1999, 34). Following the path set by Glassie and many other folklorists, I strive now to tell the story of this burgeoning pottery movement, one which is centered in the heart of the American Midwest at the turn of the 21st century, yet reaches broadly to trace influences throughout many other places and times.

Chapter 2

In the Context of Michiana: Location, History, and the Arts

As folklorist Henry Glassie has said, “History is not just the past. It is a story told about the past that is useful in the present. To tell the story of art, we project our values upon the past and gather out of it the works that are useful to us, works that talk to us about our interest(s)...” (1995, 218). I embarked on this project by asking potters to tell me their own histories, to reflect on moments of importance and people of great influence in their lives. In Michiana, their stories converged; they told me of mentors who have had an impact on the lives of many, of their shared enthusiasm for wood firing, and of Mennonite values acquired through heritage or faith. While broader networks (including other potters around the country or the world whose artwork or friendship, encountered through travel, printed materials, or online engagement through social networks) also influence their work, it is quite clear that *presence* still matters. The landscape that provides the trees and thereby the wood for wood firing, the prevalence of Mennonite heritage and faith that provides a community of people with shared values, the cost-effectiveness and appeal of small-town living, the development of a strong network of art teachers and spaces where art is valued and artistic growth can be pursued – all have been crucial to the development of the pottery community that can be found in Michiana today. In many ways, this pottery tradition stands apart from others that have been studied by folklorists in the United States; here, the community did not grow out of an abundance of good clay, as we see in the ceramics community in North Carolina, but instead out of an abundance of like-minded people with similar lifestyles and goals.

Two crucial contexts for understanding the Michiana pottery movement, history and place, are in many ways inseparable; history has a location, and places have history, and we cannot understand one without the other. The first task, then, is to understand the history and distinctive features of the region where these potters are living and working, since it can influence each persons' lifestyle and products in a variety of ways. The chapter that follows will give readers an introduction to Michiana as it fits within the broader American Midwest. It will provide an overview of the geographical landscape and resulting agricultural trends, as well as an historical overview of the area, including immigration patterns, religious influences, and other factors which have affected the demographics present in the area today. Of significant contemporary interest is an analysis of the area's Mennonite heritage and related tourism, as well as the focus in recent decades on support for small local businesses and the arts in the town of Goshen, Indiana, where a majority of the potters included in this text live and/or work.



Figure 2.1 - Map showing towns and counties which may be included in the Michiana designation. Created by the author, 2015.

Locating Michiana in the American Midwest

For outsiders, “Michiana” is often an unfamiliar word; bringing together the names of two states, it describes an informal regional designation centered around the border of northern Indiana and southern Michigan.¹ The extent of the region is ambiguous, but the main towns where the potters featured here have lived and worked include Elkhart, Goshen, Middlebury, and South Bend in Indiana, as well as Cassopolis, Three Rivers, and Constantine in Michigan (see Fig. 2.1). However, it is also important to note that while their addresses may indicate these cities or towns, most of the potters prefer more rural properties that lie on the outskirts rather than in the town proper. Furthermore, definitions of Michiana can vary extensively, and are often based on the inclusion of particular counties rather than towns. For example, the Michiana Area Council of Governments is “the designated ‘Metropolitan Planning Organization’ (MPO) for the South Bend Urban Area and the Elkhart/Goshen Urban Area” and it “represents Elkhart, Kosciusko, Marshall and St. Joseph Counties in Indiana;” the organization does not include any counties in Michigan (Michiana Area Council of Governments). On the other hand, the St. Joseph County Chamber of Commerce refers to its county seat, South Bend, as “the economic hub not only for the county but also for a nine-county, bi-state (Indiana and Michigan) region with nearly one million people. Locals refer to this region as Michiana.” In their definition, the Indiana counties include Elkhart, Kosciusko, La Porte, Marshall, St. Joseph, and Starke, and Michigan counties include Berrien and Cass (St. Joseph County Chamber of Commerce). Additionally, by watching newscasts and weather reports on television in this area one gets a slightly different sense: announcers on screen often say their report is about and/or for Michiana, and the maps used often include a selection of counties that reach

¹ While border studies have been quite important to folkloristics over the years, the significance of a state border is limited; those who are, for instance, living in one state and working in another, might have to navigate a more complex process of paying state taxes. However, any differences between the two states tend to play a very minimal role in their lives.

further to the east and south than those included above.² To complicate matters further, those looking at a map are likely to discover that Michiana is also the name of a village in the far southwestern corner of Michigan, which sits adjacent to the similarly named Michiana Shores, a town just over the state border in Indiana. Both of these small towns, with populations in the low hundreds, are located on the coast of Lake Michigan. Yet neither plays a part in the Michiana pottery movement as I have defined it here; those involved are found further inland, often toward the center or on the eastern side of this ambiguous region.

Attempts at official designations aside, those travelling by car – an appropriate mode of transportation in Michigan and Indiana, both of which are known for their automobile manufacturing industries – are likely to develop their own sense of the extent of the region, as signs for businesses with names including “Michiana” dot the highways and county roads throughout the northern third of Indiana and much of southern Michigan. For those familiar with the landscape of the American Midwest, the scenery of Michiana is easily recognizable; flat plains and gently rolling hills, large plots of farmland dotted with old farmhouses and Gambrel-roofed barns,³ and occasional densely wooded areas (crucial for providing the wood for wood firing, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter four) are the primary sights viewed as one travels these roads. Rivers and small lakes are also in abundance in certain parts of the landscape, and both summer homes and full-time residences often line these little waters (Fig. 2.2). Fishing, canoeing, and other watersports are popular pastimes with many residents, including the potters, many of whom are avid fishermen or sailors in their spare time.

² For example, weather reports from the ABC news station in 2015 include Berrien, Cass, and St. Joseph counties in Michigan, and Elkhart, Fulton, Kosciusko, LaGrange, La Port, Pulaski, Stark, and St. Joseph counties in Indiana.

³ These are recognizable through the symmetrical dual slope on each side of the roof, the lower slope with a steeper roof pitch than the upper slope. Construction and interiors can vary significantly. For further information on the history, distribution, and differentiation of barns, John Fitchen’s work provides a useful overview of barn scholarship and the differentiation of various barn types (2001).



Figure 2.2 - A view of the St. Joseph River from potter Mark Goertzen's property in Constantine, Michigan. The St. Joseph flows through much of the Michiana region. September 2015.

Looking to the source of this landscape, thinking in terms of geographical study, one finds the Midwest is considered part of the Central Lowland, the shape of which has been defined by glacial activity. Cold periods in the Pleistocene epoch produced continental glaciers which covered much of what would become the northern United States; their latest advance, around 10-15,000 years ago, contributed to the creation of the Great Lakes, the flat plains and gentle hills that lay near to and south of those lakes, as well as the excellent soil that developed throughout much of the Central Lowlands. Later, burning practices undertaken by the Native American population further contributed to the soil development (Trimble 2010, 16, 22-23). Furthermore, the Great Lakes and other large waterways such as the Ohio River were crucial means of transportation for Native peoples and European settlers alike. In the area that would eventually become known as Michiana, groups of Algonquin-speaking Native Americans were the first to meet European settlers; conflicts with the white settlers eventually drove

out most of the native people who had once called the area their home, and a flood of white immigrants in the early 19th century set the stage for the predominately white inhabitation of the area for the next two centuries. For these new residents, much of the appeal of the land came from the aforementioned presence of good soil and large supplies of wood; the wood was necessary for fuel and building, and as the forests were cleared, more farmable land was created. European settlers, coming from areas with similar resources, found this particularly appealing. The town of Goshen, a location central to the pottery tradition developing in the area, stands as a subtle reminder of this history; it was named after the biblical land of Goshen, in large part due to the fertile land that settlers found there when they arrived (Baker and Carmony 1975). While the land is still farmed to a large degree, the forested areas found in the Midwest are believed to be only a shadow of the once intimidating forests that covered this land; still, what has regrown provides a crucial resource for the potters now pursuing wood firing in Michiana, since the wood of multiple trees is needed to sustain the multi-day wood firing process.

Both agriculture and animal husbandry has played a tremendous role in the economies of both Michigan and Indiana in the last century and more; for example, Michigan is known to be part of the Dairy Belt, which denotes it as one of the top dairy-producing states in the U.S., while Indiana is considered part of the Corn Belt. Certainly, one is likely to find both cows and cornfields along the highways of both states, particularly where the two states blend in Michiana. Corn is the state of Indiana's top crop by yield and value, it is closely seconded by soybeans, and the two crops are often used in rotation with one another (United States Department of Agriculture). While farming is still important in the area (particularly to more conservative Amish and Mennonite families who grow their own crops and often sell to other local residents and business), farming is not the only large industry in the Michiana region; there is also a long-standing association with automobile manufacturing. Detroit and its long history with the Ford company is not far away, but more directly in Michiana, there have been substantial imprints made by the Studebakers in South Bend, and the RV (recreational vehicle)

industry in Elkhart County. One local tourism website claims that “Elkhart County manufactures one of every two recreational vehicles on the road today” (Elkhart County Convention & Visitors Bureau 2015). Additionally, the RV/MH (manufactured housing) Hall of Fame is located in the city of Elkhart. Yet further analysis of the economy of the area shows that the recent recession (ca. 2008) and national shift to a service economy has affected Michiana as much as many other places in the country. It may be best known to many today as a destination for Amish, Mennonite, and Germanic heritage tourism.

Religion and Regional Heritage Tourism

The current religious demographics in the Midwest can be in large part attributed to early European settlement patterns in the area; for example, a strong Catholic presence can be traced back to the many early French settlers and missionaries (Kilar 1993, 977). The University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, a large Catholic research university and location of one of two substantial college ceramics programs in the Michiana area, now stands as a prominent reminder of this heritage. After the French, settlers moving west from their previous homes in New England brought more Protestant belief systems to the area. Immigrants coming from both Ireland and Germany were also substantial contributors to the growth of European influences in the area; while the Irish were primarily Catholics, the German immigrants were much more diverse and included Catholics, Evangelicals, Lutherans, Methodists, and many other religious sects. While this diversity makes generalization difficult and problematic, social scientists claim that “aspects of the German character – rural conservatism, a strong work ethic, and dogged persistence – became an integral part of Great Lakes society” (Kilar 1993, 979). Indeed, a strong work ethic and persistence are values to which many potters in the area now attribute their artistic and professional success.

The group of German immigrants was comprised of many Anabaptists; being heavily persecuted in their homeland for their views on the necessary reforms to the Christian church, they found

there was great appeal in the religious freedom and the aforementioned availability of fertile land in the new world. Those who made their way to Indiana were mostly Amish (named for Jakob Ammann), or Mennonites (named for Menno Simons) of Swiss and German descent. While the history of these Anabaptist groups is complex in terms of belief and practice, it will suffice here to say that the Amish initially split from the Mennonites in the late 17th century, and then the Old Order Amish split again in Indiana in the late 19th century, both times due to differences of opinion as to how best practice their faith, with the groups splitting off having a tendency to prefer more conservative interpretations of the Bible. While there is still a substantial group of Old Order Amish in the Michiana area today, there are also slightly less conservative groups, such as the Conservative Amish Mennonites (known since the latter half of the 20th century as the Conservative Mennonite Conference). After many splits in the church, it is also notable that most of the Amish who did not split into the Old Order Amish eventually joined with Mennonites to form a new general conference, the Mennonite Church, in the 20th century; this is the same organization with which Goshen College is now associated. The merge, which began in Indiana and Michigan, eventually spread throughout the United States and became the largest cohesive Mennonite body in all of North America (Rudolph 1995).

Of course, religious practice is challenging to quantify, in large part because figures on membership and attendance are imprecise, but it is worthwhile to provide a brief look at some of the demographic data that demonstrates the prevalence of the abovementioned religions in the Michiana area. One obstacle in pursuing such information comes from the fact that the national census no longer collects information on religious affiliation, as law prohibits any religious question be mandatory; some religious organizations are counted as businesses, yet this provides little detail on individual practitioners (United States Census Bureau). Furthermore, a main source on data regarding churches and church membership, the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies (ASARB), relies only on the religious bodies who were found, contacted, and choose to provide information for their

surveys. Nevertheless, the state- and county-level figures provided by ASARB offer a basis for grasping some of the broad religious trends in northern Indiana. For example, their 1990 survey of religious adherents accounted for 47.5% of the total population of Indiana (based upon the national census in the same year). The largest single group to report was the Catholic Church, which accounted for 26.5% of the total adherents, while members of the Mennonite Church accounted for only .7% of the total adherents in the state of Indiana. The data for Elkhart County, however, reflects substantially different trends. While the total adherents reported in the county accounts for approximately 45.2% of the population, a very similar percentage to that from the state overall, only 16.2% of the total adherents in the county are from the Catholic Church. The United Methodist Church and the Mennonite Church come in at a very close second and third place, respectively, with the United Methodists accounting for 14.7% and the Mennonites accounting for 14.4% of the total adherents in the county, indicating a very dense population of Mennonites in this area compared to the rest of the state (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies 1995). Additional data provided by the ASARB indicates that this trend has continued as late as 2010, and furthermore shows that counties in northern Indiana have some of the highest population percentages of Amish and Mennonite Church members in the United States.⁴

While these statistics indicate that one could define Michiana at least partially in religious terms, this is just a small sampling of the data available, which is included here only as an example of the religious demographics of the area, and not as a definitive enumeration of religion in Michiana. Furthermore, numbers do little to indicate individual people's experiences of faith. However, it is clear that - related to the abovementioned Germanic influence - the concentration of many Amish and Mennonites in the area has contributed much to the shared values of peace, acceptance, neighborliness,

⁴ This analysis is based on population penetration maps provided by the ASARB and based on their *2010 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study* (Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies 2012).

and service that exist among most members of the Michiana pottery community. Although the potters discussed in this text are not all part of the Mennonite heritage or faith, there are often strong undercurrents of these values in the narratives they share about their work in clay, many of which will be explored in further depth in chapter three. Certainly every potter is influenced by their surroundings, and those who do choose to stay and work in this area are quite likely to share similar values, even if they come to those values via different means.

Having spent substantial time in the area, I can confirm that the Amish and Mennonite communities in Elkhart and surrounding counties tend to have a substantially larger public visibility than most other faith groups. This can, in part, be reconciled by the acknowledgement that some of the more conservative Amish have distinct styles of dress and transportation that visually set them apart when they are out in public (see Fig. 2.3, for example). However, most contemporary Mennonite Church members – including the potters in this book who are of that faith – do not ascribe to these particular traditions. The presence of Goshen College, which is affiliated with the Mennonite Church, also helps to account for the religion’s visibility, as well as the large population of adherents to the Mennonite faith. However, one should also consider that a tally of those who are members of specific church groups neglects to acknowledge those who attend less regularly or who maintain an individual faith outside of a formal church setting, not to mention those who consider themselves to be secularly affiliated with the “Mennonite heritage,” which they often attribute to their upbringing or familial ties, rather than shared religious convictions. A majority of the potters featured in the following chapters acknowledge close ties to the Mennonite heritage or faith, but whether or not they were counted in a religious census is of little consequence; what matters to this ethnographic account is that, for many of them, affiliating with some aspect of the Mennonite identity is a large part of both their individual approaches to their work, and their shared experience as a community.



Figure 2.3 - The horse, buggy, and numerous bicycles parked outside of the heavily-attended weekly farmer's market in downtown Goshen, Indiana are common sights around the Michiana area. May 2013.

In addition to the above demographics, trends in the promotion of Michiana tourism also play a large part in the visibility of the Amish and Mennonite faith in this area; signs for Amish furniture stores populate the region's highways with frequency, and attractions such as Das Dutchman Essenhaus ("the German eating house") in the town of Middlebury, Amish Acres in Nappanee, and Menno-Hof (a non-profit visitor center that interprets and presents aspects of Anabaptist history) in Shipshewana all tout their religious associations, as well as the availability of home-style food in nearby or associated restaurants, and hand-sewn quilts and other similarly handcrafted items in the gift shops. Considering Dean MacCannell's model for the designation of tourist attractions, these sites are clearly named and marked with signage that deems them worthy of attention by outsiders to the community. Additionally, many brochures and booklets available in area hotels promote attractions such as these, and a number

of tourist-oriented websites also provide similar information for travelers; the sites are thus mechanically reproduced and made available quite broadly (MacCannell 1976). For example, the AmishCountry.org website boasts the experience of “A simple life lived well,” and throughout the site, descriptors such as “heritage” and “historic” are found in abundance (Elkhart County Convention & Visitors Bureau 2015). It is clear that these attractions are presenting a kind of staged authenticity, a performance of Amish life as it is imagined to have been lived in both the past and the present, a gentle introduction and risk-free encounter for those who are not themselves a part of the Old Order Amish lifestyle. To this end, themed hotels in the area such as those attached to Amish Acres and Das Dutchman Essenhaus advertise hand-crafted wooden furnishing and beds adorned with quilts, alongside the convenience of free WiFi and swimming pools. And, despite the emphasis on advertising homemade foods and handcrafted items, a great deal of mass-manufactured trinkets can also be found on the shelves of the Essenhaus gift shops, often in the form of jewelry, clothing, and home décor marketed toward women of middle age and older. Nevertheless, those who view the advertising materials and signage so broadly available in Michiana will likely come away with the sense that this is a region where one can purchase a variety of items carefully crafted by artisans who hold themselves to high standards; a regional reputation which is now also supported by the expansion of locally-owned small businesses and locally-grown and crafted consumables for sale in Goshen, although such goods are promoted in a different way.

From Past to Present in Goshen, Indiana

When Dick Lehman and his wife Jo decided to move from their long-time home in Elkhart, Indiana to a new place – particularly one where Dick could have a designated studio space for all of his pottery work – they asked themselves a critical question in regards to the location: “Where is our community?” The answer was Goshen, and it was on the outskirts of this town where they eventually



Figure 2.4 - Dick Lehman's new studio (right), open to the public for the first time during the 2015 Michiana Pottery Tour. September 2015.

bought property and built a new home and studio (Fig. 2.4). For them both, being close to a strong network of friends was important; for Jo, being close to the elementary school where she teaches was a priority, and for Dick, being close to other potters was also a main consideration. As Dick's narrative of the recent move attests, Goshen, Indiana is a particular locus of the Michiana pottery tradition addressed in this text. It is home to the Old Bag Factory, where Mark Goertzen now runs the pottery studio that Dick used to own. It is the location of Goshen College, where Marvin Bartel taught dozens of ceramics students, many of whom have now settled in the area. And it is host to a number of craft guilds, including the Goshen Clay Artists' Guild, where many potters make their work and/or teach classes. In other words, Goshen is in many ways the central node of the broader Michiana pottery network, and the development of a vibrant arts community in recent decades has been a substantial influence in the concurrent establishment of a strong regional pottery community. Therefore, a look at

the town's history and demographics provides a helpful context for understanding the progressive direction in which it has been moving in recent decades.

Goshen is currently home to over 30,000 residents, and although it is smaller in size than the neighboring city of Elkhart (located to the northwest), Goshen is the county seat of Elkhart County and is large enough to be well-known to residents around the region of Michiana. As previously mentioned, it was named after the biblical land of Goshen, and today it is also known by the moniker "Maple City," which reinforces the presence of maple trees and the availability of maple-based products in the area. Fittingly, much of the city's signage, online presence, and its flag feature a maple leaf or leaves. As noted in the above section on immigration, throughout its history Goshen and surrounding areas have been predominately white. This fact recently gained great media attention after Goshen was named as a former "sundown town," a term designating towns which, through various formal or informal means, excluded African Americans from residing or even staying in town overnight. The term gained great recognition after the publication of the book by the same name (Loewen 2005). In March of 2015, the city acknowledged this aspect of its past, issuing a public apology and formally stating that such discrimination is no longer condoned nor permitted; Loewen himself has praised this approach and recommended it as a model for other former sundown towns (Loewen 2015).

Despite this contentious history, Goshen is now becoming a place that some, including potter and local art teacher Cindy Cooper, appreciate for its diversity. "There are so many cultures at Goshen. I love that," she says. The 2010 census supports the conclusion that people with more diverse backgrounds now live in the area; out of a total population of 31,719, there were 24,812 who identified as white, 815 who identified as Black or African American, 381 who identified as Asian, and 4,693 who identified as some other race. Additionally, 8,903 identified as Hispanic or Latino (of any race), and a vast majority of that group – 7,781 – identified as Mexican (U.S. Census Bureau 2010). Most notably, the



Figure 2.5 - This sign on the south side of town greets visitors as they drive north on Indiana State Road 15. January 2014.

black or African American population had nearly doubled since the 2000 census, and the Hispanic or Latino population had grown by over 3000 people, while the white population saw very little change. Goshen College also boasts a substantially diverse population on their campus, with brochures indicating they have 32% students of color, and 10% international students. And, while they strive to be inclusive

on campus, they also strive to immerse students in other cultures through study abroad programs, in which 80% of their students participate. International engagement is definitely a strong part of the lives of some of the Goshen College graduates who are now potters living and working in the Michiana region; many have travelled abroad for service trips or for artistic purposes.

Another means for visitors and residents to get a sense of the town's history is through visiting the Goshen Historical Society, which is located in the former Adams Store, a building along Main Street that was constructed in 1888. Their museum space is open to the public every Saturday, plus additional hours on other days for occasional special events. Exhibits inside are arranged in cabinets along the exterior walls, and in lower glass display units through the center of the building, with the occasional incorporation of significant historical furniture, such as desks from particular city offices or businesses.



Figure 2.6 - A section of Main Street in downtown Goshen. The Goshen Historical Museum is the second building from the left, situated between Gutierrez Mexican Bakery and Snyder's Men's Shop. May 2013.

The more permanent displays that I have viewed over the past three years (2013-2015) have tended to have an institutional focus; highlighting memorabilia from local schools, city services such as police, firemen, and utilities, and locally-owned businesses which are no longer in existence. There is also an area dedicated to commemorating the Palm Sunday tornados of 1965, a disastrous event wherein twin tornadoes swept through the county, destroying many buildings on the outskirts of town, and severing utility lines; over 300 people were injured, and 49 Elkhart County residents were killed. Those who served in various wars are also commemorated in small sections of the museum. Yet overall, one is likely to get the impression that industry and locally-owned business is a primarily point of historical pride for this town. Signs, photos, and other artifacts from numerous companies and small businesses are displayed throughout the space; there is a section featuring Goshen restaurants, and one featuring Goshen grocery stores. Further adding to this sense was my own experience during a visit in 2013, when a member of the Historical Society took a few moments to point out the exhibits that were most meaningful to him and noted in particular his sadness that so many of the businesses shown are now closed; this brought to my attention the fact that nearly all of the labels in the exhibit that discuss businesses include both an opening and a closing date.

Certain longer texts also play into this historical perception of pride in local businesses; for example, a booklet on display at the museum titled “The Inside Story of Goshen Industry, 1954” is available for visitors to peruse, and contains twenty-five pages, each featuring a different company. The introductory text states, “Goshen, as you know, is basically a town of smaller industries, a fact of which we can be proud.” A history book sold by the museum store (and also more broadly available through national book retailers), is titled “Goshen: The first 150 years” and gives a similar impression of the

historical importance of small businesses and industry.⁵ Chapters on industry, leisure, and local retailers have clear links to this theme, while other chapters are consistently peppered with mentions of local businesses and photos of the same (Conrad 1981). It becomes clear, through these resources at least, that for some portion of the residents of Goshen working industriously in a small, locally-owned establishment is a worthy endeavor. It is also likely that this mindset has played a part in the success of newly established small businesses in Goshen.

Many potters and other artisans whom I have spoken with trace the beginning of the burgeoning arts community in Goshen to the redevelopment of the Old Bag Factory by Larion and Nancy Swartzendruber in 1984 (Fig. 2.7). Built nearly a hundred years earlier in 1895, this large and recognizable building to the northwest of downtown Goshen was at first home to the Cosmo Buttermilk Soap Factory. In 1910, the Cleveland-Akron Bag Company was offered the building for their new endeavor in Goshen, which was eventually operated by their subsidiary, the Chicago-Detroit Bag Factory; after a later merger, it came to be known as the Chase Bag Factory. Today, parts of the building are dedicated to exhibits which illustrate the work that was done at the factory until its closure in 1982.⁶ Machinery, sample products, photos, and testaments from former workers are included in these exhibits. On the exterior of the building, a painted sign proclaims the importance of “BAGOLOGY” in large letters; it seems this term was coined to indicate the company’s dedication to the making of bags. The Old Bag Factory’s current website claims the term was used during the heyday of the Chase Bag Factory and means “to elevate the production of bags to the level of science” (The Old Bag Factory

⁵ The book was written cooperatively by members of the community and the Goshen News staff, and the content of many chapters is based upon a series of local newspaper articles that looked back on the history of Goshen at the time of the nation’s bicentennial in 1976. The book was then published in 1981 as part of the town’s Sesquicentennial celebration.

⁶ The preceding historical summary was constructed primarily from information included on signs posted within the Old Bag Factory building in 2013.

2011). Now, the sign serves as a large visual reminder of the building's history within the community, despite having been put to new purposes; after a period of closure in the 1980s, the Swartzendrubers restored the building and opened their own handcrafted furniture store in the space, along with other small businesses.

Dick Lehman, who would become one of the most prominent potters in Goshen, was friends with Larion and opened his pottery studio in the Old Bag Factory alongside Larion's furniture store. Dick attributes much of the success of this kind of revitalization project to strong, trusting relationships among members of the Goshen community. He recounts, for example, a story about the gas kiln that he built when moving in to the Old Bag Factory: it was a new, fuel-efficient heat-exchange design



Figure 2.7 - The Old Bag Factory is no longer used as a factory, but the building is well cared for in its new role as a home for several small local businesses. August 2012.

developed by Goshen College professor Marvin Bartel, and as such, there were no standards or safety regulations on file for inspectors to consult.⁷ Dick had trust in the quality of the design and in the many safety features Marvin had incorporated, and the inspector who approved the installation also showed that trust; Marvin, after all, was the only available expert, and having used the kiln himself, he was able to offer his reassurances about the kiln's safety. When we spoke about this experience, Dick also acknowledged there are probably a number of individuals – particularly city officials – whose willingness to support the arts and trust the intentions and the quality work of the developers or artists involved has played a considerable role in the arts development in Goshen, even though their names might not be as prominent in the public record.

Many Goshen residents and artists do publically attribute much of the growth of the arts in their town to the development of the Goshen guilds, which were established in large part due to the vision and support of David Pottinger and his wife, Faye Peterson Pottinger. While David Pottinger, now 85 years old, started his career working in plastics in Detroit, he has spent much of the last 25 years working toward the improvement of the town of Goshen (O'Hara 2015). He and Faye began by restoring the South Side Soda Shop in the 1980s, and in the following years they have also played a substantial role in the preservation and revitalization of many buildings in Goshen's downtown area (Petry 2012). And, of particular influence to the artists in the area, the couple provided great support for the development of numerous Goshen art guilds. Potter and high school art teacher Cindy Cooper met Faye Pottinger through school connections, and they quickly became good friends; Cindy attributes much of Faye's interest in the arts and the establishment of the Goshen Clay Guild to her background as an art historian. Thinking of the many additional projects which have bolstered the now-flourishing art scene in

⁷ Further information on this kiln design can be found on Marvin Bartel's website at <http://www.bartelart.com/firing/ecokiln.html>, or in his article in *Ceramics Monthly* (Bartel 1990).

Goshen, Cindy says an arts-oriented community was greatly desired; it grew intentionally because “so many of us made an effort to make that happen.” In addition to the Clay Guild, established in 1998, the Pottingers were also responsible for developing spaces for other artisan guilds in the town. Around the time that the Clay Guild began to grow out of its initial space in the back of the Maple City Market in downtown Goshen, the Pottingers purchased an old lumberyard near the Millrace Canal and developed it into the Millrace Center, which includes space for the Farmer’s Market, a local café and bakery, a specially-designed new building for the Clay Guild, as well as buildings for the Jeweler’s Guild, Photographer’s Guild, Painter’s Guild, and Woodworker’s Guild.⁸ Regarding this project, and others, David Pottinger has said, “We’re trying to turn [Goshen] into a community where our local people don’t have to go out of town for what they want, whether it’s food or entertainment or community gathering” (McGurk 2011).

Using Melanie Smith’s typology of tourism, the Amish heritage tourism described previously in this chapter could be considered a blend of both heritage and cultural tourism, since there are strong references to Amish life as lived in both the past and the present, while the kind of experiences being promoted in Goshen are better considered a kind of arts tourism, particularly “the need for the arts to become more accessible to wider audiences, and to promote lesser-known arts activities” (Smith 2009, 13). The other key difference from the heritage tourism discussed above, however, is the Goshen focus toward appealing to local residents: rather than marketing resources to outsiders, the intention is to improve the quality of life in the town for the residents, by providing opportunities that they find relevant and useful. In this regard, the Pottinger family’s influence also stretches beyond real estate: their son-in-law and David’s business partner, Jeremy Stutsman, is a former long-time city council

⁸ The Clay Guild and details of its location are discussed in more detail in a section of chapter three.

member and recently elected Democratic mayor of Goshen, Indiana. Stutsman was a popular choice among Goshen potters, not only because he is Moey Hart's brother-in-law. During his 2015 mayoral campaign, he was hailed as a progressive who would continue to support the arts and other important social and economic projects of benefit to Goshen residents.

One of these projects is headed up by Zach Tate, ceramicist and instructor at Notre Dame, who is also the Executive Director of the newly developed Goshen Youth Arts center (Fig. 2.8). He and his wife Leah Schroeder are two of the five board members who are working to open the center in downtown Goshen. Just as Dick Lehman described, much of the project has hinged on trust and support from city officials. "The city has been so gracious," Zach says, but gaining their support was not without its challenges. Eventually, after their first attempt to purchase a building for the project fell through, the city agreed to sell them an old and long-vacant home at a substantial discount, with the understanding that they would complete renovations very quickly – a goal with which the organization was happy to comply. "We had a lot of long conversations about what this would look like, this relationship, and eventually began to trust each other on it." He emphasizes that the project and others like it represent "an investment in people, not an investment in capital," and he acknowledges that it takes a particular mindset to give support to such a project. Part of the concern, Zach understands, is that artists can have a reputation for being unreliable; this is an apprehension he has encountered with a number of institutions, including grant funding organizations. "But there's also the fact that the artist is a person that's a thinker, they are a doer," he says in response. "They also have to be very ambitious, they also have to be very clear and concise with what we're doing, and they also have to be prompt. So we want to try to build those attributes up with the city and let people know that if you entrust this with us, we will make good on what we say we're going to do." Thus far, the project is moving forward at a very quick pace, having first taken shape only about two years ago, when Zach made the permanent move to Goshen after many years of regular visits to the area.



Figure 2.8 - The building that will house Goshen Youth Arts. August 2015.

Much of Zach's enthusiasm for Goshen Youth Arts is related to his previous work with youth in the area. He has taught a summer wood firing course with Goshen High School teacher Cindy Cooper for four years, and he also taught a summer workshop for children in nearby Mishewaka with potter Justin Rothshank. He described how the Mishewaka elementary school they worked with does not have a designated classroom for art, and therefore "to see [the students] working in 3D for possibly the first time ever was a really awesome experience... Given the opportunity, these kids can really do some

amazing stuff.” Although Mishewaka is around a 30 minute drive from Goshen, he has already had parents ask if they can bring their children to Goshen Youth Arts for classes, and Zach says he has no intention of turning them away. “It’s pretty amazing how thirsty they are for stuff like this,” he says. Ultimately, he and the other organizers of Goshen Youth Arts hope to make their classes free in order to make them as accessible as possible; in the meantime, they are using a sliding scale based on income in order to help accommodate children coming from lower income families.⁹ But Zach’s goals stretch well beyond the children of Goshen and surrounding towns: “One of the things about this art scene that I’m hoping we can do is not just create the culture of art with kids, not just help kids, but also bring the community together with it. I’ve got a lot of public art projects in mind,” he says, looking to the future.

While the growing emphasis on the arts in Goshen tends to be focused on benefits for residents, there has recently been increasing media interest in Goshen as an arts destination, both within the state of Indiana and on a national scale. For example, American Craft Magazine (published by the American Craft Council) printed an article in July of 2015 highlighting potters, jewelers, sculptors, and a variety of other artisans in the area as well as the venues through which they exhibit and sell their work. “Makers are everywhere in Goshen,” the article claims. “They’re living and working in the Hawks rental building aimed at artists and entrepreneurs, a former furniture factory where each unit includes extra work space. They’re hanging out at one of the three [*sic*] craft guilds in town. They’re showing their work – at the indoor, year-round farmer’s market or one of the numerous craft fairs around the area or the once-a-month party known as First Friday. Or they’re firing a kiln together on the edge of a forest outside of town. A number of artists... marveled that other artists who used to tease them about living in the

⁹ Offering free classes is a particularly admirable goal given that the most recent data released by the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that approximately one third of children in Goshen live in households with an income that either is (or has in the last year been) below poverty level (Bureau 2013).



Figure 2.9 - Crowds line Main Street during a summer First Friday celebration in Goshen, while proud owners parade their vehicles up and down the street. July 2013.

middle of nowhere are now hailing the high level of work coming out of Goshen.” And the article is quite inclusive, noting others who are working outside of the usual artistic mediums; highlighted are the recently established Goshen Brewing Co. (known for its locally sourced food and craft beers brewed on location) as well as Janus Motorcycles, a small company that offers two different handmade models created out of locally sourced parts (O'Hara 2015). Many of the area potters note these same trends in our conversations, claiming that Goshen has become a maker-friendly place, one where they find good friends in like-minded individuals – and not just other potters – who understand the time and dedication it takes to run a small business and/or work in the arts industry.

Furthermore, venues such as Goshen Brewing Co. (Fig. 2.10), Constant Spring restaurant and bar, The Electric Brew coffeehouse, and other Goshen shops often provide unique retail opportunities



Figure 2.10 - Goshen Brewing Co. sits to the west of downtown Goshen, and is a popular destination for many area residents and craftsmen. August 2015.

for some of the area potters, and other artisans as well. Custom ceramic mugs and other handmade pottery vessels featuring the venue's logo are often either available for sale, or provided for regular clients who may have their own numbered mug designated for use within the venue, as has been the case at Constant Spring. Even the tap handles at Goshen Brewing Co. were made by area potters, and many of their employees are craftspeople from around the town who find it useful to hold a steady job alongside their work making and selling art. For example, Viki Graber is well known for her basket weaving, but also works at Goshen Brewing Co.

Two additional craftsmen with small businesses have played an important role in the pottery scene in Goshen; Troy Bungart, who makes and sells hand-made brushes and wooden pottery tools, and Moey Hart, who recently established Northern Indiana Pottery Supply. Troy's business primarily operates out of his home in Two Rivers, Michigan, where he has a substantial workshop for both pottery

and woodworking, and he routinely supplies potters with custom brushes and wooden tools for their creative endeavors. He also sells his wares online, and has taught brush-making workshops. Moey's business, Northern Indiana Pottery Supply, is located on the west side of Goshen, on his family's large farm property. Part of his business entails routinely picking up (or receiving shipments of) materials from suppliers further away in the Midwest, and then delivering those materials to Michiana potters. More recently, he has also begun to make slip which is available for sale, and he also sometimes slip casts and bisques items that can be purchased by other potters. In addition to their supply-oriented endeavors, both Troy and Moey are avid potters themselves. Troy, for example, loves experimenting with shino glazes, and he and Moey often fire a small experimental soda kiln on Moey's property. Both men have close relationships with the other potters in the Michiana community, and it is clear that those who work in the area appreciate having personal relationships with men like Troy and Moey, who provide local resources for crucial supplies, and who are also very enthusiastic and available to participate in wood firings and events such as the Michiana Pottery Tour.

The Michiana Pottery Tour

One relatively new annual event included in the growth of the arts in Goshen and surrounding areas is specifically related to pottery, and highlights the importance of the potters as a part of the arts in this region. The inaugural Michiana Pottery Tour took place on a crisp, clear Saturday, the 29th of September in 2012. Established on the model of other tours around the country, this event encouraged visitors to travel, by car and of their own accord, to any of eight locations in the region where potters hosted open house events at their studios, where their work would be on display and for sale. The locations for the first tour were comprised of a variety of spaces including home studios, the Goshen Clay Artists Guild, and the Goshen College Ceramics department. A map of the sites, including approximate driving distances, was prepared and provided both online and in print at the various



Figure 2.11 - Each year, these bright orange signs for the pottery tour help guide visitors as they drive from location to location. September 2012.

locations. Initially growing out of conversations between Dick Lehman, Mark Goertzen, and Justin Rothshank – particularly as they acknowledged more and more potters were becoming established in the Michiana area – the tour provided an opportunity to draw in both old and new customers and to demonstrate the broad scope of pottery available in the area. Additionally, visits to the potters’

individual studios (often situated at their homes) have a very personal feel and allow potential customers to interact with the potter in a more intimate setting than would be available at, for instance, a large group gallery show (Fig. 2.12).

In 2012, the idea of a studio tour was not new to the world of contemporary American potters; around the country, a number of dense regional groups of potters support one another and join together to organize events that will support their community and their work. Dick Lehman indicated that part of the Michiana inspiration drew from similar establishments in St. Croix, Minnesota, and in New York. Fred Driver also echoes the importance of the St. Croix group, influenced by well-known potter Warren McKenzie, and many potters in the Michiana area also acknowledge the success of the



Figure 2.12 - Chad Hartwig, exhibiting at the studio of Notre Dame professor Bill Kremer in Cassopolis, Michigan, discusses his pottery with a potential customer. August 2014.

North Carolina potteries. Well established and well attended, a variety of tours, trails, and kiln openings around the U.S. doubtless served as inspirations and models as the new Michiana Pottery Tour developed. When I spoke with Mark Goertzen a few weeks before the initial 2012 tour, he was cautiously optimistic about the possibilities for this new endeavor: "Hopefully it will grow enough where we have cause to be open more than one day," he said at the time. Prior to the establishment of the tour, Mark routinely held a fall kiln opening at his home studio, so he knew he would be able to draw a crowd, though the size of the crowd for the entirety of the tour (and their propensity for buying work from other potters) was uncertain. Before the start of the first tour, talk was of committing to at least two years - not giving up even if the first year was slow. However, business was not lacking on that first day; cars lined Mark's long, wooded driveway and spilled into nearby streets, and most locations saw a substantial number of visitors; as I moved from place to place, I saw potters in near-constant interaction with their guests, with many smiles as they discussed their work and wrapped up customer's purchases. By the end of the day, the future of the tour began to sound more certain as sales added up. The great success of the first event, defined by the potters as including a significant number of attendees and sales during the day, inspired them to continue the event for a second year in 2013.

Furthermore, at the encouragement of the 2012 attendees, the second tour in 2013 was expanded to two days, which allowed visitors more time to browse the pottery available at all of the locations. This was a huge improvement for those who had felt they only had time to choose just a few locations to encounter in the course of one day, or, alternatively, found themselves quickly rushing through each location without much time to meet the potters or fully appreciate their extensive displays of pottery. Propitiously, the addition of a second day did not require much extra work on the part of the potters; displays were already prepared and were, for the most part, simply left up overnight with only minimal adjustments to ensure the safety of the pottery. Once again, the second tour had substantial crowds and strong sales, and the potters decided to continue the two-day version of the tour for a third



Figure 2.13 - A young woman takes a leisurely look at the displays set up on Mark Goertzen's property, where many low shelves lined the path between his kiln shed and his house. September 2013.

and fourth year. However, with each subsequent year, there have been slight modifications in the number of locations and potters who were participating. For example, potters such as Todd Pletcher and Dick Lehman, who participated but did not have their personal studios included in the initial tour, have each added their own newly-established studios to the list of locations. Meanwhile, some others who previously participated have left the tour due to changes in personal circumstances. Eric Strader, for instance, is in the process of moving his studio much further north, near Kalamazoo, Michigan, and no longer has his own studio location included on the tour; instead, some years he has set up a booth on another potter's property. Additionally, many of the potters have invited others from further away to



Figure 2.14 - A small portion of the numerous displays set up by invited potters at Northern Indiana Pottery Supply during the 2015 Michiana Pottery Tour. The red tent belongs to Brandon “Fuzzy” Schwartz. September 2015.

exhibit at their studios during the tour; Moey Hart of Northern Indiana Pottery supply provides a prime example of this, as his location has included six to eight additional potters for the last two years of the tour (Fig. 2.14).¹⁰

At the time of this writing, it is possible to say that the Michiana Pottery Tour is quickly becoming a very well established tour; visitors have remained numerous over the years, and sales have been high enough to make the opportunity worthwhile for most of those involved to return year after year. Soon after the close of the fourth tour in 2015, planning began for a fifth occurrence on the last weekend of September 2016. Why, one might ask, has this tour been so successful so quickly? One

¹⁰ Readers interested in the specific changes over the first four years of the tour will benefit from viewing Appendix I - Michiana Pottery Tour Maps.

could say it seems almost a karmic reward for the potters' steady dedication to their craft. Other reasons may appeal to those with less romantic tendencies, yet even with a more logical explanation, dedication has doubtlessly played a part; those who were well established in their various productions had steady customers to invite to the newly established tour. And, as the oft-repeated phrase goes, there is the importance of location, location, location! All of the sites on the tour are reasonably spaced for a day or two of travelling; perhaps more importantly, the tour locations are mostly located around Goshen, which is within a short distance from larger towns such as South Bend, IN (approximately 25 miles away), Fort Wayne, IN (50 miles), and Kalamazoo, MI (60 miles). A number of other larger towns and cities are also within a two hour drive or less, including places such as Indianapolis, Indiana, and Ann Arbor, Lansing, and Grand Rapids, Michigan. Even the larger metropolis of Chicago, Illinois is easily within reach. This creates a circumstance in which aficionados from a broader area can easily drive into and around the area for a day, or even stay overnight and continue their adventure for a second day. With this knowledge, the potters have chosen many of the cities listed above for advertising the tour via radio and newspaper ads, especially in later years of the tour as they attempt to grow their clientele.

Michiana potter Brandon "Fuzzy" Schwartz, who has assisted at Mark Goertzen's kiln in prior years and exhibited his own pottery at Moey Hart's location during the 2014 and 2015 tours (see Fig. 2.14), has offered some insight as to the number of visitors and locations they have come from. While he is quite busy selling his wares and conversing with customers, he has kept some notes about the number of people who come and, when it is mentioned in conversation, where they have come from. At his own booth in 2014, he had over 30 visitors on Saturday, and over 45 visitors on Sunday, including many locals, as well as people from Chicago, Illinois, Syracuse, Leesburg, Ft. Wayne, and South Bend in Indiana, and Brooklyn, Buchanan, Kalamazoo, and Niles in Michigan. His numbers were even higher in 2016, and included over 65 visitors on Saturday and over 85 visitors on Sunday. This year, he noted additional local visitors, as well as people from Chicago, Illinois, Elkhart, Ft. Wayne, and Indianapolis in

Indiana, and also from Ann Arbor, Cadillac, and St. Claire Shores in Michigan. The 2015 tour also brought in some people from locations even further away, including a woman from Kentucky who was visiting her sister in Michigan, as well as “a lady from Alaska visiting family and 2 potters that live in Florida and spend a few months in Chicago each year.” Fuzzy has noted that in these counts he typically does not include “family members or helpers of other vendors” unless they make a purchase at his booth; he is concerned with how many customers and potential customers he encounters in the course of the tour, and thus those who are only there in the capacity of vendor or assistant are of less concern in his data gathering. In addition to seeing a larger number of visitors in 2015 (as compared to 2014), Fuzzy also reported a larger number of items sold. While the experiences that other potters have shared with me have been more anecdotal, my understanding is that many of them have seen a similar growth in both number of visitors and sales made.



Figure 2.15 - Dick Lehman (sitting in the kiln and wearing a red shirt) explains the wood firing process as he helps to unload Mark Goertzen's kiln. September 2013.

During each year of the tour, at least two or three sites have been included that feature a wood fired kiln. As mentioned above, Mark Goertzen has long held a kiln opening in the fall, and Justin Rothshank has also participated in every year of the tour. Furthermore, Bill Kremer participated for the first two years, and his studio has the distinction of housing the largest wood kiln in the region. More recently, Todd Pletcher also built a wood fired kiln, and his participation in the 2015 tour included unloading a recent firing of his kiln. The kiln opening events that Mark (with help from the potters who joined him in the firing) and Todd have held during the tour provide an important educational opportunity for those who are not familiar with wood firing. Typically, a kiln opening in Michiana involves one potter climbing inside the kiln to pull out pots, and one or more potters staying outside of the kiln, receiving the pots that are handed out, and offering explanations to the crowd that gathers around (Fig. 2.15).¹¹ Often, if a particularly large or fragile piece needs to be unloaded, the potter who made the piece will be called on to pull it out him/herself, thus taking responsibility for both its safety, and its presentation to onlookers.

As the kiln is slowly unloaded in this manner (often at intervals, spread out at advertised times during the tour), the potters give thorough explanations of the effects that are achieved through this firing method. Their excitement when a particularly attractive or unusual piece is unloaded is visible, and their explanations as to how the effect was achieved and why it is desirable or unusual serves to teach the uninitiated audience members how to appreciate and understand the aesthetics of wood-firing. As the pots are unloaded, they are often spread out on the ground near the kiln, and when the unloading is over, the potters often gather with their customers to inspect the results and discuss the pieces they are

¹¹ This process contrasts with kiln openings held by some other American potters, which are less performative and more of a special sales event; instead of unloading the kiln for an audience, some potters prefer to unload the kiln, clean up and price the pots, and carefully set the work out on display prior to the arrival of visitors.



Figure 2.16 - Mark Goertzen (center) and Todd Pletcher (right) discuss some of their recently fired pots with a visitor during the 2012 Michiana Pottery Tour.

particularly excited about (Fig. 2.16). Furthermore, much of the education that takes place is in regards to the hard work that goes into wood firing, the impressive chemical processes that turn wood ash into glaze, as well as the unpredictability of results and the potter's lack of direct control over the final decorative patterns found on the pieces.¹² This knowledge is not commonplace among those who are not themselves potters; even potters who have not wood fired may have little knowledge about these processes. Through their enthusiasm and engaging efforts at education, the potters begin to instill their own sense of wood fired aesthetics in a broader community of potential clients, and hopefully thereby increase sales of the wood fired pottery that they so love to produce (Fig. 2.17). On the part of the well-informed consumer, then, an appreciation for wood fired pottery often belies a respect for the materials and the earth, for the look and feel of the handmade, for the skills of people rather than machines; all values which fit in well with the trajectory of the heritage tourism and arts development in the town of Goshen.

While the Michiana Pottery Tour provides a small overview of the pottery available in Michiana, (and indeed, after four years, has served as such an introduction for many) there is a much larger story to be told about the development of the pottery movement in this region. For a proper introduction to the burgeoning Michiana pottery tradition, we must take a few steps back in history: when Marvin Bartel began teaching ceramics and art education at Goshen College a bit over forty years ago, there were no production potters established in the Michiana region, yet a new pottery movement would soon arise. Chapter three will introduce this specific aspect of the Michiana pottery tradition's history, and will also provide a more in-depth look at the lives and work of the potters whom I have begun to introduce above.

¹² These aspects of the process, and many more, are elaborated in more depth in Chapter 4, The Michiana Aesthetic and the Collaborative Process of Wood Firing.



Figure 2.17 - The natural colors of the wood fired pottery (pieces here by Todd Pletcher) fit in well with the natural displays chosen by the potters and the seasonal leaves that are always present during the tour. September 2012.

Chapter 3

Education, Identity and Vocational Habitus

When I was an undergraduate student, I once overheard a ceramics professor sharing an anecdote about a former student, a young woman with a great deal of pride in her long fingernails. As I recall, the professor said he had encouraged her to cut her nails in order to better learn to throw pots on the wheel, insisting that she could not manipulate the clay properly without being able to directly press her fingertips to the clay. The young woman declined, insisting that she was quite adept at adjusting her actions to accommodate her long nails, and she was thus certain she could manage to throw pots by figuring out the necessary adjustments. Yet, in the professor's telling, she was never able to learn to throw with the long nails, and due to these self-inflicted struggles, she was barely able to pass the class. Although this anecdote was not incorporated into a formal lecture, the professor's audience consisted primarily of new undergraduate ceramics students who happened to be working in the studio at that moment; the underlying point, of course, was to encourage current students to trim their fingernails appropriately (and to adhere to other bodily practices recommended by experienced ceramic artists) if they wished to learn proper methods of throwing and thereby succeed in their ceramics classes.

Those who study folklore have long acknowledged the importance of beliefs related to one's line of work, and have often studied the verbal means via which these beliefs are shared. However, as I have already alluded to in the introduction, most studies of occupational folklore or folklife begin with a group of people who identify as workers, and focus on the expressions of identity shared between existing members of that group, often in relation to outside forces (natural, social, economic, political,

and so on). There has, however, been little critical analysis within folkloristics as to the means by which new workers are brought into that particular occupational group, and how those new members acquire their occupational identity. Furthermore, while the means by which one trains for a craft is usually addressed within material culture studies, often too little attention is paid to how one attains those shared beliefs and aspects of identity which are critical to inclusion within the occupational group. Certainly this tendency is related to a documentary trend in both material culture studies and the study of occupational folklife; Gertraud Koch, discussing in particular to the work of Benjamin Botkin, refers to this as the aspiration to “make the expertise, independence, or achievements of certain occupational groups visible” (2012, 158). Documenting where and from whom technical expertise is acquired, along with documentation of the technical expertise itself, is certainly a valuable goal when no other acknowledgement or public record is likely to exist. In the case of ceramics, however, contemporary technical knowledge is well documented and easily found in books, trade magazine articles, videos, and increasingly, a variety of online sources. And, as I have stated, it is not my purpose here to teach readers how to become potters; my goal as a folklorist is to explore how a sense of community and shared identity is developed amongst those in the same artistic vocation, and one crucial aspect of that development lies in the educative experiences shared by members of this group.

Informal lessons – such as the one recounted above regarding fingernails – are not only prevalent in training for specific areas of work, they are crucial to one’s identity development when joining a particular occupation. This is clearly demonstrated by Colley, et al. in their 2003 study of vocational education and training (VET) courses in the United Kingdom. They argue that “learning is a process of becoming,” and they offer the term vocational habitus to encompass aspects of vocational education that go beyond the acquisition of technical skills and knowledge (Colley, et al. 2003, 471). In their definition, “Vocational habitus proposes that the learner aspires to a certain combination of dispositions demanded by the vocational culture. It operates in disciplinary ways to dictate how one

should properly feel, look and act, as well as the values, attitudes and beliefs that one should espouse” (488). This framework draws on Bourdieu's concept of habitus and field and is appropriate for analyzing the pottery learning spaces available in Michiana and the sense of identity development that occurs among the potters who work in those spaces. To be clear, I do not wish to claim that all potters will necessarily identify with all of these values; this is a localized group, and the vocational habitus they share is often related to broader trends in the Michiana region as well as the specific places where they have learned and people who have taught them. In other words, their vocational habitus exists within a specific *field*: “a concept for expressing the sets of social relations characteristic of particular learning sites, educational institutions, occupational workplaces, and their associated practices” (Colley, et al. 2003, 477). Thus the potters’ presence in one another’s lives is a continuing influence and helps to reinforce their shared identity; while it is certainly possible to be a potter alone, if you are a part of this group, it is clear you do not wish to be isolated. The Michiana potters also frequently connect much more broadly with potters nationally and internationally, yet these connections are unlikely to have the same sense of immediacy nor exert the same kinds of influence.¹

The following pages include numerous examples of the creativity, collaboration, sense of space, frugality, and service that are all crucial shared values among the Michiana potters; while relatively few of the examples I will provide could be included under the rubric of technical knowledge, the prevalence of these themes in my interviews of these potters does clearly point to particular shared dispositions and values which allow for the cohesiveness and sense of community found within this group. “Because they know, understand, and habitually use the conventions on which their art world runs, they fit easily into all its standard activities,” and they have become what Howard Becker calls integrated professionals,

¹ Some aspects of the values I identify in this chapter may be shared among many in the pottery profession, while others are more specific to Michiana. A more expansive study would be necessary to make far-reaching proclamations about professional potters throughout the country (or the world), but I have attempted to note which values appear to be more broadly applicable, and which are likely more localized.

with the necessary technical, conceptual, and social skills to navigate within their given world ([1982] 2008, 228-229). My intentions for this chapter are somewhat more complex, however, and my intention is not just to analyze vocational habitus among a group of integrated professionals. Ostensibly, the first three sections provide a more in-depth introduction to many of the potters who have been my primary collaborators, some of whom were already referenced at least briefly in the previous chapters. They are introduced here often by means of their own initiations into the world of ceramics, which leads to the secondary purpose of this chapter (and also explains its thematic organization): developing a comparison of the many different learning environments available, from which the Michiana potters continually benefit. Building on this comparison, then, the primary analytical aim of this chapter is to explore the relationship between learning environments and the development of a vocational habitus, which correlates to a sense of community felt among those working in the same artistic medium; the analysis at the end of the chapter pulls together the threads presented in the potter's narratives of their initiation into the work of pottery. I will begin with a discussion of college programs, since this is often where the current Michiana potters say that either their main introduction to ceramics or their decision to seriously pursue ceramics occurred.

The Goshen College Ceramics Program

Marvin Bartel grew up, attended college, and began his teaching career in Kansas; by the time he arrived at Goshen College in 1970, he had obtained an M.A. and Ph.D. in Arts Education, as well as a good number of years of experience teaching various mediums at both the high school and college level. In reminiscing about his experiences, Marvin speaks of a lifelong passion for teaching his students how to be creative: "What they really need is the ability to think, and know how to ask questions, and how to come up with ideas, and how to persist, and how to hang in there when the going is tough." Marvin's approach to accomplishing this is multifaceted, and includes a critiquing practice which helps his



Figure 3.1 - Marvin Bartel poses for a photo in the sunny upstairs of his studio. He makes many large pieces such as the ones shown here; notably, both the pedestal sink and the toilet shown in this image would be functional if installed. September 2014.

students learn to evolve ideas out of their own work rather than imitating others, as well as a calculated structure of coursework which leaves students curious and eager to take more courses after the first semester. As an active artist in multiple mediums throughout his life, including metals, painting, drawing, clay, and woodworking, Marvin also stresses the importance of creating his own artwork while teaching: “I’ve never thought I could be a good art teacher if I wasn’t an artist,” he said (Fig. 3.1). The discoveries

he made about creativity in his own life undoubtedly led to the influential teaching methods that others in the Michiana pottery community still remark about today.

Marvin often states that an important part of teaching creativity was the method he employed for critiques: he would always ask students to make at least two or more items, which could then be compared: “Now that we’ve got two of them, we don’t have to say anything bad about anything,” he says, touting a constructive, comparative approach.² Students will be successful, he believes, “if you can teach them how to develop ideas, and realize, mindfully realize that they’ve developed them themselves – the teacher may be there sort of egging it on,” he laughs, “and actually a lot of times, it’s very hard to find the good thing happening, and you have to really look for it to affirm it. But that’s my role, when I’m doing my job right. That’s what I’m trying to do as a teacher, is to look for the smallest little good thing that happened, so I can give some affirmation.” It seems that Marvin’s positive, encouraging approach was indeed fruitful; many of the current potters working in the Michiana region have been Marvin Bartel’s students, and they are not afraid to try new processes.

In reflecting upon their time as students, a number of the Michiana potters have commented on the importance of Marvin’s “try it and see” philosophy. Dick Lehman explains that his personal desire and willingness to experiment with many aspects of the pottery process go back to his days as a student: “There has always been a ‘what if’ component [in my work], and I would say that goes back to Marvin Bartel. Many students have said, and it was my experience too, that as beginning students we’d go to Marvin and say, ‘What do you think would happen if we tried this?’ And he would say, ‘Try it and see.’ I know now, from this perspective, that he was learning from us, and that we did things that he already knew wouldn’t work. Because he had been around, [he knew] there are certain things you just don’t do,

² This method is described in more detail in “The Art of Motivation and Critique in Self-Directed Learning,” Marvin’s contribution to the recently published book, The Learner-Directed Classroom (Jaquith and Hathaway, 2013).



Figure 3.2 - Marvin demonstrates some of his decorative techniques to children visiting his studio during the 2015 Michiana Pottery Tour.

you don't put this much flux in a glaze, you don't put that much colorant. Well, we didn't know any better and we did [those kinds of things], and some of those things were marvelous. So we learned, he learned, and the most important learning was that it's okay to try something new." After 30 years as a potter, Dick's work is still consistently evolving as he experiments with new ideas for forms, textures, and glazes.

Marvin also shares a story which clearly illustrates his support for experimentation amongst his students. Describing Jeff Unzicker's early days as a student in ceramics at Goshen College, Marvin says, "I came down [to the studio] one day and he was sitting at the wheel and he had this... he had decided to try [making a pot] where you throw and coil them, in order to make it bigger. And he had it about, I don't know, three feet tall or something. I said, 'Jeff, this is great! [pause] Have you measured the kiln?'" Marvin laughs heartily, recounting this moment. He continues, "Jeff said, 'Oh, I don't care if I can fire it, I



Figure 3.3 - A collection of tall pots stand impressively outside the Unzicker Bros. Pottery studio (now closed). April 2012.

don't care, I just wanted to see if I can make it.' I said, 'Oh, that's great, just do it, see how big you can make it.'" Marvin recounts. At first, Jeff made a pot so wide it would not fit through the doorway. After that, he made one that was still large, but slightly narrower. It could be moved through the doorway, yet was still too large for the kiln. Marvin remembers, "He made this really tall thing, you know, and that thing was sitting around there for weeks. And then one day he came and said, 'What if I would dig this real deep hole out here in the yard, would there be a way I could fire this tall pot in there?' And... there are different ways you could answer that question. I said, 'As far as I know, it's never been done, but I'd sure like to see you try.' And so he went right to it." Eventually, with Marvin and Jeff working together, the pot was successfully fired in an experimental kiln consisting of a gas burner, a large hole in the ground, some fire bricks, and the lid of an electric kiln. Today, Jeff Unzicker is still making monumental pots, although these days, he typically fires in more conventional kilns; Jeff is well known for the quantities of impressive two to three foot tall wood fired pots which he and his brother have sold at art fairs around the Midwest (Fig. 3.3).

Marvin also attributes much of his success as a teacher to the structure of the coursework he offered at Goshen College: "My reasoning is, you can learn to make a pinch pot in a day. If you're going to learn to throw, it takes years. So you have to start throwing right away, because it takes the longest to learn. I could work all the hand building in along the way, and they could learn everything. By the end of the first semester, [my students] knew so much of what they didn't know yet, they had to take another semester! It really grew the department." He continues, "[Students] don't even know they want to throw, except once the word gets out. Then they come and watch their friends, and 'Oh, wow, can I try this?' [I would respond], 'Well, take the class.' So that's the way, if you're a teacher, you'll make yourself indispensable really quickly." Marvin also explained the results of this enticing learning, even after students had finished their coursework: upon inquiring about what they have been doing, they often respond: "Well, I've been making pots." Because they know how to learn – so why should they

stop? They don't need me anymore. That's what makes me feel the best." Indeed, over half of the participants in both the 2012 and 2013 Michiana Pottery Tours (and nearly a third in 2014) had been Marvin's students, an impressive tribute to his influence in the area's pottery community.³

Following Marvin's retirement, Merrill Krabill was hired at Goshen College to teach ceramics, as well as a variety of other art classes, and he is now the chair of the Goshen Art Department. Merrill began his own artistic career as a student at Goshen College, where he remembers beginning ceramics by throwing on the wheel. He appreciated starting with a technical challenge such as this, and says that beginning with a focus on process can help lead you into addressing aesthetic questions – for him, this was better than being faced with a “blank canvas,” needing to come up with ideas without first developing an understanding of the potential of the medium. Now, after nearly 15 years of overseeing the ceramics students at the school, Merrill still attributes some of the teaching approaches at Goshen to Marvin's influence, particularly instilling an appreciation for creativity. He describes this as an approach that focuses on not just following directions and copying others, but learning to develop one's own ideas. He also prefers to make sure that all students are included in the entire process of making, a method which Merrill also says began with Marvin. “It's important to know how kilns work, how clay is mixed,” he says, noting that these are practical skills students will need to have once they are on their own after college. No aspect of the process should remain a mystery while in school, because the student would then be unprepared to pursue work independently.

Also in regards to students' future aspirations, the current art program at Goshen College features two tracks that students who wish to pursue ceramics can choose from – the studio track prepares students for grad school (including more focus on writing about one's artwork), while the entrepreneurship program does more to prepare students to run a small arts business. There is also a

³ See Appendix I - Michiana Pottery Tour Maps for lists of tour participants from 2012 - 2015.

strong visual arts education program at Goshen College that produces a number of future K-12 art teachers, many of whom choose ceramics as part of their studio art training. Merrill notes that the ceramics facilities are rather small – Goshen College is not a large school, and the ceramics program is likewise small, often with only 5 or 6 students enrolled in the advanced ceramics class – but the fact that their studio does not have excessive resources or all-new technology is not a problem because he knows it helps his students be better prepared to figure out how to make artwork with what they do have available. This is a particular benefit to students who will someday teach or who follow the entrepreneurship path, since they are likely to be in a situation after school where they have few resources to work with; building a full studio and gathering the necessary equipment and materials can be very expensive and potentially not attainable (particularly for arts educators who have to teach in multiple media), so it helps to learn to “make do with what you’ve got.” He also states that “ethically, it feels nice to recycle and reuse,” noting that they do things such as mixing their own clay, which allows for the reincorporation of used, unfired clay called “reclaim.” While enrolled at Goshen, Merrill’s

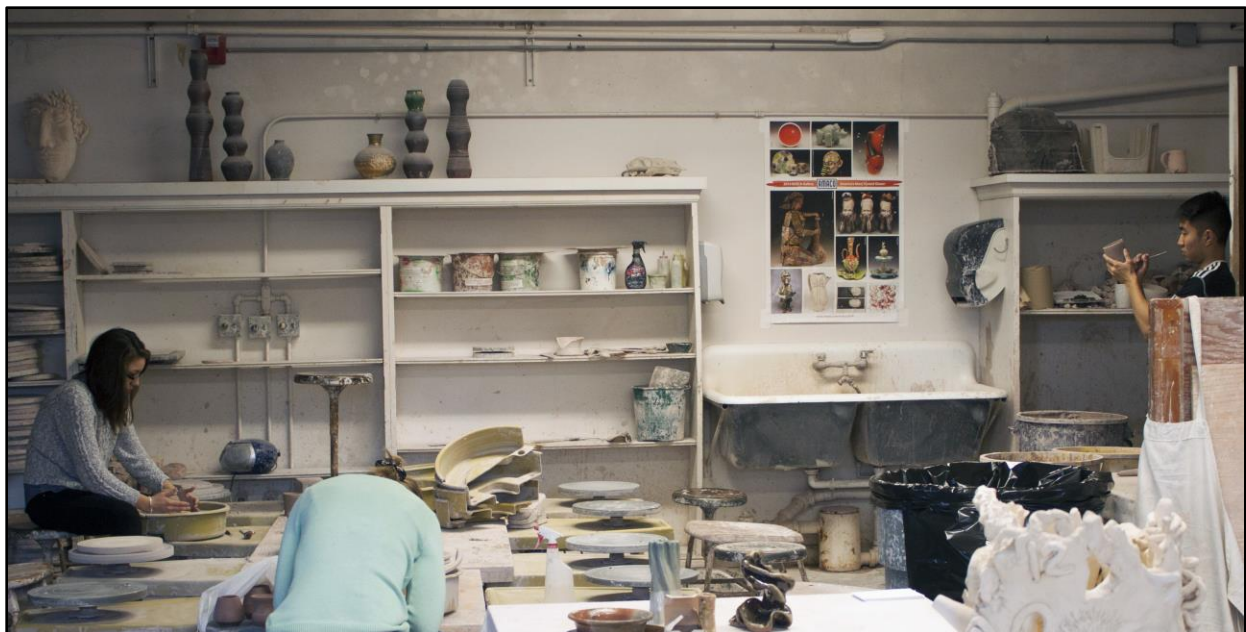


Figure 3.4 - Current students at work in the Goshen College ceramics studio. November 2015.

students (as Marvin's did previously, as well) frequently connect with the local pottery network in order to find part time work, apprenticeships, or wood firing experiences that augment their collegiate training in ceramics; the extent and impact of such opportunities will be addressed in the following sections of text.

Sources and Results of Apprenticeship in Michiana Potteries

During or after college (or sometimes without a college ceramics experience at all), many who desire to become production potters find that their best path is to arrange an apprenticeship, assistantship, or internship in the studio of a working potter. This trend is not limited to Michiana, and the benefits of just such a path are discussed often in texts aimed toward a ceramics-student audience; for example, potter and professor Julia Galloway hosts an extensive website called "Field Guide for Ceramic Artists," and her chapter with recommendations for post-graduation includes a substantial section on apprenticeships, alongside other sections on artist-in-residence opportunities, workshops, grants, and further college experiences via a post-bac or master's program. She cites many potters who have written on the topic of apprenticeship, including Silvie Grantelli, Val Cushing, Mark Hewitt, John Glick, and Gary Hatcher, and concludes that "apprenticeships can provide a nice bridge between university education and practical, real world concerns for ceramic artists... Apprenticeships offer a unique opportunity to gain insight into the life you plan to live and will undoubtedly provide real world experience that may help you become successful in the field" (Galloway 2015). Most of the articles she cites and the suggestions that she personally adds focus on the importance of knowing exactly what the apprenticeship will entail, and ensuring it is a good fit for both the student and the mentor. Many of the comments on apprenticeship found in these articles pertain to the benefit of acquiring the personal attributes needed to run a pottery studio, most of which fall outside the technical skills needed for

simply producing work in clay; this clearly reflects the concept of developing vocational habitus, as proposed by Colley, et al. (2003).

Folklorists with a focus on craftsmanship have previously acknowledged the role of apprenticeship in the development of a craftperson's identity. For example, Marjorie Hunt devotes a chapter to the learning process in her exploration of the stone carvers of the Washington National Cathedral. Her focus is often on the rigorous teaching of technical skills and knowledge about tools, and the hierarchy of roles and process of ascending from apprentice to master. However, she also gives great attention to the apprentices' process of learning to adhere to standards of workmanship and aesthetic principles which are exemplified and touted by those with experience in the trade (Hunt 1999). Similarly, the following section gives concrete examples of the links between mentors and former/current apprentices in the Michiana community which lie beyond simple technical knowledge, and illuminates the kinds of influences these educative relationships can have on the future work of an apprentice.

One of the main sources of ceramic apprenticeship in the Goshen area for many years was the studio of Dick Lehman. Although he personally did not complete a college degree in ceramics, nor did he have an apprenticeship, Dick did get his own introduction to ceramics via the college environment. In the mid-1970s, one of Marvin Bartel's ceramics students, Bob Smoker, introduced his friend Dick to the joy of throwing pottery. Dick recalls the occasion with fondness, saying, "I just loved it from the beginning. It was so responsive, and you had something to show for your efforts. Much of what I was doing was academic and there was no substantial product at the end of it, so I think that is one of the things that attracted me." After this initial experience, Dick went on to learn from Marvin Bartel before eventually setting out on his own. Most full-time potters in the area now were Marvin's students and/or



Figure 3.5 - Dick Lehman explains the wood firing process to visitors at his new studio during the 2015 Michiana Pottery Tour.

Dick's apprentices; experience working in the production pottery studio that Dick established has played a strong part in the education of a number of potters working in Michiana today.

As for his own beginnings as a potter, Dick vacillated between religious work and pottery, eventually finding that his enthusiasm for clay was worthwhile to pursue full-time. He describes, in the meantime, the rather tedious process by which he was making pots: going to Goshen College to rent

their clay mixer, taking the clay home and into the basement to make the pots, bringing the pots up to the garage to bisque, back to basement to glaze, borrowing a van to take the pots to the kiln site, and so on. “It struck me, at a point, that it was both ridiculous and maybe profound at the same time because it indicated to me that I was wanting to do this badly enough... that I would be willing to do all that.”

Finally, in the spring of 1981, Dick began to work with clay full-time. Initially, he rented space from a friend and local furniture maker, Larion Swartzendruber, where he set up his studio. A few years later, when that space was no longer available, the two decided to continue their collaboration and moved into the Old Bag Factory together, along with a number of other artists and craftsmen.⁴

Jokingly, Dick recounts his early sales strategies as he set up his shop: “The savvy of my marketing approach was, okay, my customers, they walk into this building and to get to my studio they have to walk through the furniture showroom, and they see a \$3000 roll-top desk and a \$300 chair, and they get to my studio and see a \$30 casserole, and they say ‘Okay, I’ll take two!’” he laughs. There must be some truth to the usefulness of this approach, because the same studio space still sits in the Old Bag Factory, accessed via a walkway that leads visitors directly through the middle of a furniture store. Of course, Dick acknowledges that there was a learning process involved, and his sales acumen developed over the years: “Starting a business, you either do learn the things you need to do or you fail, and I obviously figured out a way to do it.” After over 30 years of pottery-making, having exhibited his work internationally and published a number of insightful articles, it is safe to say Dick has figured out quite a lot about the business of being a potter.

The production line that Dick developed often utilized brushwork decorations, applying “an intensely colored glaze over less intensely colored glaze.” Though Dick says he never properly learned how to draw, he considered learning to use a brush to be an engaging challenge. In its heyday, Dick’s

⁴ See chapter 2 for a more in-depth history of the Old Bag Factory.



Figure 3.6 - This plate, created for Goshen College, illustrates some of the detailed brushwork used in Dick Lehman's productions. Photographed from the author's personal collection, 2014.

studio incorporated three or even four employees, often including students from Goshen College who would come to work part-time, at first mixing clay or glaze and later throwing pieces for the production line once they were more experienced. "Each of us worked on every pot, whether it was loading or unloading or waxing or glazing or, in my case, I decorated everything," he says. Dick acknowledged that his employees were also aspiring potters, and he tried to encourage their own development as individual potters while they were also working in service of his studio. "I think probably the hardest thing in production pottery is to be an employee of someone else, and to spend four days a week making that person's aesthetic using that person's glazes." To nurture the development of his apprentices, Dick says he "asked them for 35 hours a week, and to get that done in the first 4 days. And then, they would have 3 days to make their own work." Additionally, employees were able to use studio

materials for this individual work, and paid a nominal price, set by Dick: “I lost money on every pound [of clay] I sold because I thought it ought to be a fringe benefit, but it ought not to be totally free; there needed to be some ownership and responsibility so that they would be making things that they really wanted to make,” he recalls. Dick also instituted the “Thursday Night Challenge,” an hour-long weekly occasion where the studio employees would work individually to tackle a problem in clay, then come together to share ideas and try new strategies.⁵

Employees of the studio were also invited to take part in designing new items to be produced by the studio.⁶ Dick recounts his philosophy in occasionally introducing new designs, saying “I think part of the job of the production potter is not only to make good things that work well and are aesthetically pleasing and that people enjoy having around them, but also keep the maker’s interest. So that does mean some change.” When it was time to design a new product, Dick would offer the opportunity to his employees, to see if anyone else wished to work on the design; this approach, he says, “has moved the aesthetic along – it’s no longer just mine, it’s a collaborative venture, and I think it’s better work than I could make alone.” He also believes there is an important state of mind necessary when undertaking this kind of collaborative work: “It takes a mature person to participate in that... to participate in the design of a production piece. If they’re feeling too much propriety about their work, then they can’t do it. If they see this as something we’re doing together...” then, he believes the venture will be successful. Dick is now well known in the world of pottery for his beautiful, gestural forms, as well as his experiments with extremely long wood firings and various glazes. Dick has also served as a mentor and an inspiration for many Michiana area potters, and many of the Michiana Pottery Tour participants have had the experience of apprenticing with Dick during his tenure at the Old Bag Factory studio.

⁵ Dick has written in more detail about this experience in his article titled, “The Thursday Night Challenge: Stagnation, Deepening and Stoking the Fire Within,” published in *Ceramics Monthly* magazine (Lehman, 2008).

⁶ This was true particularly in the later years; Dick also recounts that, initially, he kept a tight hold on the design work and everything produced was of his own invention.



Figure 3.7 - Mark Goertzen stands in his studio, proudly holding one of his favorite wood-fired pots. August 2012.

One of Dick's apprentices was Mark Goertzen; he arrived in 1989, intending to work with Dick Lehman for a year. Having studied ceramics at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas, Mark wanted to find a place where he could make functional, vessel-oriented pots, an opportunity most ceramics graduate programs would not provide for him. However, Mark found the opportunity he wanted when his professor, Paul Friesen, introduced him to Dick Lehman at a National Council on Education for the

Ceramics Arts (NCECA) conference, at a point when Dick was fortuitously looking for an apprentice. It is worthwhile to note that this connection to Kansas, where Marvin Bartel also hails from, is no coincidence; both areas have significant Mennonite populations, and a number of potters have moved back and forth between the two areas, noting that they are happy to find like-minded people in their new hometowns.⁷ Over twenty years later, Mark reflects on his decision to come to Goshen: “I didn’t envision this being long term up here,” he says, “but it has turned into my home.” Mark indicates that although he was not particularly fond of the Goshen weather, the studio environment encouraged him to stay: “I came here and everything at the studio looked almost exactly how I imagined my own [studio] being. I became friends with Dick as well as his employee... I didn’t intend to stay here, but I did.” Now, Mark is a mainstay in the Michiana pottery community, and he has taken on Dick’s role as a mentor to new apprentices.

In 2010, Dick was dealing with a life-threatening illness and made the difficult decision to sell the Old Bag Factory studio and to do his pottery work at home, to the extent he would be able.⁸ At that time, Mark purchased the Old Bag Factory studio, and the space has remained much the same for the past 5 years, though it is now re-named Goertzen Pottery. One of the features of the layout that Dick has touted is the arrangement he prefers to use for his glazes. When visiting a friend and fellow potter whose studio was located in an old grain silo – meaning it had only curved walls – and Dick was impressed by the convenience of having the glazes in a curved arrangement around central shelves containing the pottery. By keeping his glaze buckets on wheels, Dick finds he is able to mimic this

⁷ Fred Driver, the current Director of the Goshen Clay Artists Guild, also studied under Paul Friesen in Kansas before transferring to Goshen College and studying with Marvin Bartel. Merrill Krabill also taught at Bethel College in Newton, Kansas before coming to teach at Goshen College. Additionally, Tom Unzicker moved to Kansas in 2013, where he has been busy setting up a new studio and building a new wood kiln (his brother Jeff has remained in Indiana).

⁸ Dick is now, happily, in much better health; as mentioned in chapter 2, he and his wife recently moved closer to Goshen and built a new home, alongside a substantial studio space for Dick.

arrangement in his own studio on days when he has a lot of glazing to do; he can wheel the glaze buckets into a semi-circular arrangement, and then easily move them back out of the way when he is done glazing. Dick first implemented this arrangement at the Old Bag Factory, and has since reused the idea in setting up his new home studio. Another more permanent feature of the Old Bag Factory space – and one which is more noticeable to visiting customers – is the openness that exists between the production area and the display area of the studio. If you were to visit Mark today, you would notice

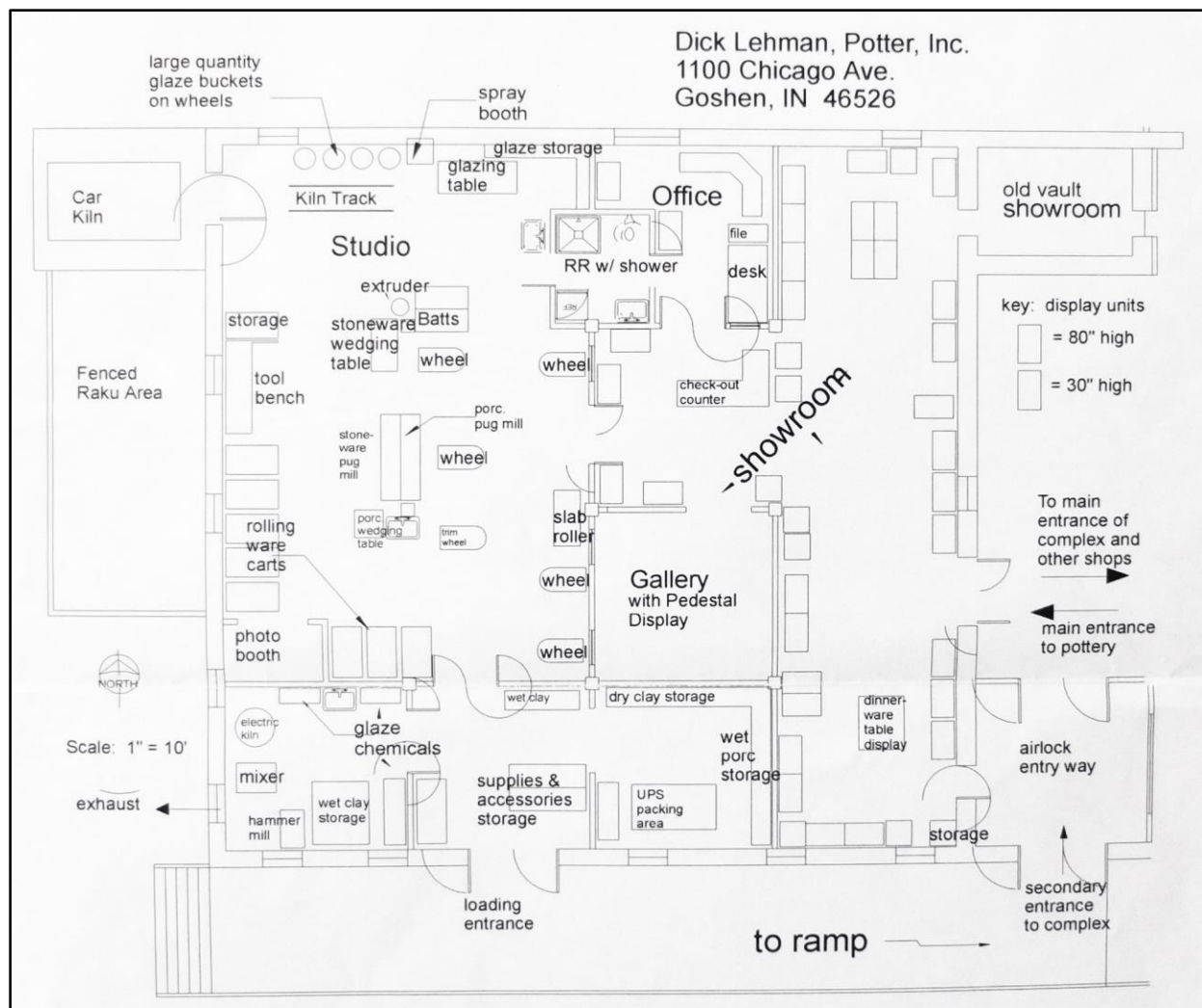


Figure 3.8 - The layout used at the Old Bag Factory, as designed and implemented by Dick Lehman. With minor changes, it remains much the same under Mark Goertzen's ownership. Image courtesy of Dick Lehman.

there is a large, open archway between the showroom and the studio work space, through which you can almost always see one of the potters working at the wheel. This setup has remained much unchanged since Dick owned the studio; the wheels, at which the potters spend much of their time throwing and trimming, are centrally located and allow the potters to have a view of customers entering the store, and also have the advantage of allowing customers to easily observe how the pottery is made (Fig. 3.8). Other items in the studio that are used less frequently – the large gas kiln, various materials, drying racks, glazing space, and so on – are located on the periphery, along the exterior walls of the studio space, allowing the potters to spend much of their time within view of the sales floor while producing the work they sell.

While Mark and his employees still produce very similar pots and have continued some of the same lines that originated with Dick's ownership of the studio, many of the pots in the production line now show more influence from the aesthetic choices Mark has made after Dick left the studio. Discussing the shift, he says "My aesthetic has never been a lot of brush work. I like glazes that do some running and dripping. I like some of the sense of 'not controlled.' Sometimes pots come out better than you were hoping for... and sometimes they come out worse," he says, discussing this attempt to let go of control. Though he has kept some of the same forms and glazes from Dick's designs, which appeals to customers who have long collected work from the studio, Mark has also begun pursuing new additions to their selection of glazes. "It has added a nice freshness to our studio," he says, "and actually also made me think of making new forms. The [glazes] I'm interested in are sort of runny glazes and now I can start making forms for taking advantage of that. I think that's also been nice about this studio, there's always been a sense of play here. Not just cranking out work, it's important to crank out some work, but there's also encouragement to explore, play a little bit, in hopes that aesthetics grow and keep growing. And so, I think that's maybe why it has been an attractive place for young people for a little bit



Figure 3.9 - A large jar on display in Goertzen Pottery features some of the dripping glaze effect that Mark likes to pursue. August 2012.

as a lay-over.” He describes the studio as, ideally, a three-person endeavor; the work flow seems to be best when there are three pairs of hands to work on various aspects of the production.

In the last few years, Mark has preferred to keep at least one or two apprentices or assistants working for him, as well as minimal additional staff to help with the sales floor. Mark’s wife Suzanne, a professor of education at Goshen College, helps out, particularly with some of the promotional writing

and sales online. He has also hired a local woman who comes in on occasion to help clean and dust the numerous display shelves in the shop. Like many production potteries, the shop has busier times of year, particularly around Christmas, and some much slower times: “The first four months of the year are very slow here,” Mark says, “so that’ll be the time when we develop glazes and such... The first four months actually, it’s kind of a nice rhythm of sorts, if you know you have enough in your checking account, because that’s the time when we can a little more purposefully experiment on form, rather than just doing a little bit here and there.” Under Mark’s guidance, production at the Old Bag Factory continues to move into the future with a steady combination of new inspirations and past successes - a balance first struck by Dick Lehman, and later instilled in the many apprentices who have been educated within its walls.

The legacy of the Old Bag Factory studio space, first incorporated as Dick Lehman, Potter, and now called Goertzen Pottery, is also evinced by the number of former apprentices now running their own pottery studios in the Michiana region. Among these are Justin Rothshank and Todd Pletcher; both Justin and Todd were students of Marvin Bartel, though Marvin retired soon after Todd started classes at Goshen College. Todd still has a strong connection via his apprenticeship with Dick Lehman at the Old Bag Factory, where he also worked side-by-side with Mark Goertzen. Unlike Todd and Justin, Eric Strader did not attend the Goshen College ceramics program – instead, his main training came from working under Dick Lehman. Like all of the Michiana potters, their personal styles are distinctively different, but Justin, Todd, and Eric all provide examples of the new ateliers being established within the flourishing Michiana pottery tradition.⁹

⁹ In addition to these three potters who work in the Michiana area, there are dozens of others who are now further spread. See Appendix II for a complete list of those who have worked under Mark and Dick, as well as those who have worked with Justin Rothshank, who also now also provides apprenticeship experiences in his Goshen studio.



Figure 3.10 - Justin Rothshank, along with some of his wood fired and decal ware, outside of his studio during the 2013 Michiana Pottery Tour.

Growing up in Goshen, Indiana, Justin Rothshank connected with clay during his early school years. "I came into high school being interested in clay because of my middle school teacher," he says. During his later years at Goshen High School, Justin studied under Cindy Cooper, who is still teaching high school students and is an active member of the local Clay Artists Guild. It was she who introduced

Justin to Jeff Unzicker, who was just a few years older, and Jeff first introduced Justin to wood firing. During his senior year of high school, Justin enrolled in a clay class at Goshen College with Marvin Bartel, and he continued his studies there after high school, as well. “There was a really good community of clay folks there at the college,” he recalls. After graduating, Justin went to Pittsburg to complete a year of service, and was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker. During that time, he stayed engaged with clay, even setting up a studio in his basement; he says it was at that point when he really began pursuing clay. In the midst of his year of service, Justin “connected with other folks who were raised Mennonite, committed to arts, faith, and community development,” and decided to start a non-profit which came to be called the Union Project.¹⁰ Located in a repurposed, one-hundred-year old church building, the organization functioned as a community center and included a fully functioning clay studio, a sanctuary for worship, a venue for performances, a coffee shop, and office spaces available for small businesses to lease. Justin was a founder of the organization as well as the first staff member hired, and he spent about eight years working for the Union Project, running their clay studio and developing a line of production pottery.

In 2009, Justin and his wife decided to return to Goshen, and he brought his production line with him when he came. They built a home just west of Goshen, and also built a studio building where Justin works on pottery on a nearly full-time basis. He now sells his work wholesale in many galleries around the country, and he is well known for the unique decals (often bright red poppies, political figures, or pop culture images) that he adds to his pots. Justin’s work has a heavily layered look, often involving the layering of two colors of glaze, plus multiple decal images applied over those glazes. His process involves first glaze firing his work, then re-firing at subsequently lower temperatures to adhere the decal images;

¹⁰ Justin has described this experience in much more detail in an article titled “Union Project,” published in *Ceramics Monthly* magazine in 2007 (Rothshank and Stevenson).



Figure 3.11 - A selection of Justin's work on display in his studio during the Michiana Pottery Tour in 2015. The top row features a portion of his series of bowls and mugs with decal images of the presidents of the United States. September 2015.

Justin sometimes fires a piece upwards of 4 times in order to layer on all of the glazes and decals (Fig. 3.11). He is well known for his technique, which he often shares when he teaches workshops – both locally and around the country. As a result, many potters in the Michiana area have begun to incorporate some amount of decal decoration into their own work. Locally, Justin is involved in the Clay Artists Guild in Goshen, where he has often taught clay classes. He also provides apprenticeship experiences at his own studio, providing some materials and space to work in return for help with his production line, or other tasks around the studio. He also built a wood fired kiln on his property soon after moving to Goshen, and connects with many local potters through the two to three annual firings of his kiln (an aspect of the community which will be discussed further in chapter four).



Figure 3.12 - Todd Pletcher shows off a wood-fired pot in his studio, which he has set up in the barn on his property. May 2013.

In some ways, Todd Pletcher is a more recent addition to the Michiana pottery community, though he has a long history in the area; though he grew up in Goshen, Todd spent many years working in Chicago after graduating from college and only returned to live in the outskirts of Goshen in fall of 2012, with his partner Anna. Todd's story is rather similar to Justin's - he began making pottery in high school, and then worked at the Old Bag Factory pottery studio with Dick Lehman and Mark Goertzen while attending Goshen College (he was enrolled there during the transition between Marvin Bartel and Merrill Krabil). However, after graduating, Todd spent a number of years working in another field before realizing he wanted to return to clay. "When I was up in Chicago, I was learning a lot about what I didn't want to do with my life," he says. Around 2007, Todd began to shift back to pottery, teaching ceramics classes at different locations in the city and selling some of his own work. Todd explains that he finds

pottery much more engaging now than he did toward the end of his time as an apprentice: “When I was making my own designs, as opposed to making someone else’s design, I didn’t mind sitting down and spending a day making coffee mugs,” he says, though he also mentions the tedium that many production potters can face when making large runs of the same item over and over. To develop his own production line, Todd says he often looks back to lessons learned as an apprentice. “I picked up enough working at Mark’s, or I guess it was Dick’s at the time, working with those guys, to have a pretty solid understanding of what I need in order to run a business like that... His system, that he had put in place over all those years, was built on efficiency, trying to find the quickest way to generate a really quality product,” Todd recalls. After moving, he began to slowly improve his new studio space, and trying to get a sense of the market both locally and nationally (primarily, at least at first, through online sales). When I spoke with him about this endeavor in 2013, he discussed his hopes for expanding his facility and said, “I swore that I would never borrow money to do this, so I’m putting it together as I make sales.” He has indeed been able to do so, slowly and steadily, and after about three years he was even able to invest in building his own wood kiln on the property.¹¹

By moving back to Goshen, Todd hoped to find a good market for functional pottery, and he also appreciated having fellow potters nearby: “That’s one of the good things about being in Goshen – Justin is here, Mark and Dick are here, so we can bounce ideas off each other quite a bit.” Having a number of potters in the same area can be challenging, though, particularly since Mark and Todd do relatively similar work, “The biggest thing is trying to figure out where to sell without really intruding upon Mark’s business. I think if we compete against each other in some ways that’s good, in some ways it’s a little bit rough on the both of us. Justin is sort of unique in that Justin’s work is different than what other potters are doing in Goshen, so he doesn’t really compete with the same market,” Todd explains, as he muses

¹¹ Todd’s new kiln will be discussed in further detail in both chapter four and chapter five.



Figure 3.13 - A selection of Todd's wavy-rimmed wares on display during the 2014 Michiana Pottery Tour. The sign reads, "Why wavy rims? Because they are comfortable to drink out of. And they're unique, not your average wheel-thrown pot. Plus we think they look nice..." September 2014.

about ways in which his own work is unique –undulating lips and wavy line details often set his vessels apart from the rest (Fig. 3.13). Reflecting on these challenges, however, Todd also counters the difficulties with a positive outlook: “The more awareness we bring to the area the better it is for everyone. If I can get people to come from my contacts in Chicago, to come down to the tour or to stop by to purchase work, they might realize that they like Justin’s work or Mark Goertzen’s work more than mine, in the same way that someone who finds out about me through Mark might decide to buy from me. So, the more awareness there is about the community in general, the better it is, we think, for everyone.” Additionally, he says, “Almost all of us are Mennonite, so that whole sense of community and working together in sort of a service-oriented fashion seems to be another thing that also helps us get along.” Though his studio was only recently established, Todd is very much in tune with the Michiana pottery community, and he is finding ways to be successful as a potter. He has hosted

workshops at his spacious studio, and he also has thriving online sales through Etsy.com, particularly during the holiday season. Todd is also becoming quite well-known for his wood-fired work; for example, he was selected as one of *Ceramics Monthly* magazine's 2015 Emerging Artists, and had wood-fired pottery featured in the publication. Additionally, much of his reason for building his own wood kiln was because he needed to fire more often in order to meet growing demands for his work.

Justin Rothshank and Todd Pletcher are by no means the only results of the collegiate and apprenticeship opportunities in Michiana, however. One further example would be Eric Strader, who



Figure 3.14 - Eric Strader holds one of his pitchers, not yet glaze fired, which was inspired by his grandfather's sculptural forms. July 2013.

has found his own niche in the Michiana market, often producing large runs of customized mugs for nearby breweries and coffee shops. Eric also makes many unique functional pieces using a carbon trapping glaze, and the distinctive “sun spots” on his work set his displays apart. Eric looks to his family for his first introduction to the world of ceramics; his grandfather, Stanley Kellogg, was a well-known Michigan sculptor and potter. Although his process is rather different than Kellogg’s mold-oriented work, some of the work Eric creates (particularly his pitchers – see Fig. 3.14) echo his grandfather’s forms. Eric’s wife, an elementary art teacher, also helped to reintroduce him to clay during the time that they were dating. After moving to Goshen, Eric met Dick Lehman and found that there was an opening at Dick’s studio for an apprentice, “so I kind of learned everything from the ground up, there,” he says. “I learned everything, starting out with mixing clay and glazes, but then also I learned how to throw, making 50 or 60 of one form at a time, which I’ve always said was the best way to learn,” he says. After his 5 years as an apprentice at Dick’s studio, Eric began to make pots in his own home and to fire his pottery at the Goshen Clay Artists Guild. Once the guild moved into a new building, Eric took over their old space behind the Maple City Market for a number of years. Currently, he is working at home in Goshen, and has begun to build a new studio on family property near Kalamazoo, Michigan, where he expects to relocate someday in the near future; he has already moved his large gas kiln and does all of his glaze firing there.

Like Eric, Bob Smoker also draws a strong connection between the guild and his ability to pursue a ceramics career. Bob was one of the founding members of the Goshen Clay Artists’ Guild in 1998, renewing a love of clay that had grown stagnant for nearly twenty years while he pursued other jobs and raised his family. Bob originally came to love clay as a high school student in Pennsylvania, and later studied ceramics at both Hesston College in Kansas, and Goshen College in Indiana. After many years in the guild, he finally “quit his day job” in 2010 and decided to pursue ceramics full-time. Eric and Bob’s involvement with the Goshen Clay Artists Guild points toward another important aspect of the Michiana

pottery community; the existence of a guild facility in Goshen has allowed many potters to continue working in clay after their formative experiences as college students and/or potter's apprentices.

Gathering at the Goshen Clay Artists Guild

The establishment of the Goshen Clay Artists Guild has been significant to the development of a robust ceramics-oriented community in the Michiana area, since it provides a space for those who do not wish to (or cannot) work in clay full time and/or do not want to take on the expense and responsibility of setting up and maintaining their own studio. In recent years, the guild has typically maintained a membership of around 25-30 members, at least half of whom are quite actively and regularly involved in making pots. Nestled on the bank of the Millrace Canal and situated just behind the local farmer's market building, the guild is currently located in a generously sized building, which includes a large workspace with twelve wheels and many work tables, a glazing area, a glaze materials



Figure 3.15 - The current Clay Artists Guild building, which replaced their former location behind the Maple City Market in downtown Goshen. May 2013.

room, a kiln room, a photography room and small library, and a kitchenette.¹² The Clay Artists Guild is definitely a central location for the Goshen pottery community to gather and to learn; throughout the year clay-related classes and workshops are held frequently in their facility. In fact, these adult classes (which are open to the public) often lead to the addition of new guild members.¹³ Marvin Bartel has reflected on the establishment of the guild, saying “I was very pleased when that got organized, because I was still teaching, and every time somebody graduated and didn’t have a place to work, then I’d feel bad because, you know, they wanted to work and they didn’t have a place to work. There were some, like Dick Lehman and so on, that could... they’d just figure out a way to get a studio and get going, but that’s a pretty major choice to make. So there were a lot of people that wanted to keep doing something else, but also see whether they could do pottery.” Now, members of the guild have access to the facility any time they wish, with the exception that they are asked not to work during class times. In an interview in 2013, director Fred Driver described the range member of involvement, saying, “There’s only one guild member, Bob Smoker, who is a professional who [makes pottery at the guild] full time. The rest of us go from half time down to just... paying for a space, actually. Some want to try and support the arts so they pay for a space but they don’t actually work here.” The guild is run on a voluntary basis, with a few members like Fred in leadership roles and others involved in various committees.

In addition to hosting classes and workshops that are open to non-members, the Guild also interfaces with the broader Goshen community through various sales and events throughout the year. Guild members have the option of selling their work at the Guild’s booth at the farmer’s market space,

¹² As described in chapter 2, the Millrace Center was developed by David and Faye Pottinger. The complex of buildings also includes suites for other local artists’ guilds, including the photographers, jewelers, painters, and woodworkers guilds.

¹³ It is worthwhile to note that the membership of the guild is primarily adults older than college age, and the guild typically does not cater to students; this is one of the reasons that Zach Tate has found there is a need in the community to establish a youth arts space, as discussed in chapter 2.



Figure 3.16 - Founding member and director Fred Driver stands with some of his in-progress work at the guild. May 2013.

which is only a few steps away from the front door of the Guild; to do so, members must take shifts sitting at the booth and also pay a small commission percentage to the guild. Additionally, over the course of a year the guild traditionally holds two sales of member work, one in fall and one in spring. Their fall sale has now been incorporated into the Michiana Pottery Tour, and they have been included as a location on all of the Tours thus far. The guild also organizes a soup benefit every year: each member makes a number of bowls for the occasion, then at the mealtime event customers purchase a handmade bowl in which their soup (provided by the potters and/or by local restaurants) will be served. The bowl is then theirs to take home. Each year, the benefit raises around \$10,000 for a local homeless charity, and in recent years, the potters have served between seven and eight hundred bowls of soup at



Figure 3.17 - Founding members Bob Smoker (left) and Cindy Cooper (right) work at the guild during the 2013 Michiana Pottery Tour.

each event. “It’s a good benefit, and we really like to stay in touch with the city, with the community, rather than just be an isolated group of potters,” says Fred. The guild’s desire to make their artistic output relevant and helpful to their broader community is clearly related to trends in the growing Goshen arts scene, as discussed in chapter 2; to paraphrase David Pottinger, it is about making Goshen a better place for its residents, by providing what is needed locally.

Indeed, the guild’s members connect with the community in many ways beyond their membership activities. Two members, Eric Kauffman and Cindy Cooper, teach ceramics classes at the local high school, and have been responsible for inspiring a younger generation of Michiana potters. Cindy has also worked with Zach Tate to offer a summer wood firing workshop for high school students over the last four years. In regards to her relationship with her students, Cindy says it is important for

her to identify as an artist first, and a teacher second; she appreciates the catharsis she finds through her artwork, and she enjoys being able to share that understanding with her students as they begin to identify as artists, as well. Cindy finds “a beautiful connection” among potters, perhaps a closer connection than what is found in some of the other guilds. She attributes much of that communal feeling to the fact that the potters must all work closely together – artists in the guild and students in the school – sharing space and equipment, working out of the same glaze buckets, and so on. In these kinds of environments, getting along with one another and having a mutual understanding of the work is crucial.



Figure 3.18 - Guild members Patricia Burns (left) and Eric Kaufmann (right) take their turn at the sales counter during the 2013 Michiana Pottery Tour.

Vocational Habitus Among Michiana Potters

Throughout my conversations with all of these potters about their beginnings in clay and their experiences working in shared spaces, a number of themes slowly began to emerge; readers will likely have noticed the repetition of values such as creativity and experimentation, awareness of space, collaboration between artists, frugality and efficiency, and service to others; threads which I will pull together and analyze more closely in the following pages. These are not technical skills, but instead are a “combination of dispositions demanded by the vocational culture,” as prescribed by the concept of professional habitus (Colley, et al. 2003). Those who are central to the Michiana network of potters all express similar values in the process of their work, and have a similar understanding of the embodied experience of being a potter, all of which leads to a sense of community among them.¹⁴ Indeed, many express their desire to stay in this particular location due to the similar mindset of those whom they will see and interact with on a regular basis. As Colley, et al. point out, this connection is inherent in Bourdieu’s argument, since field and habitus are co-constructing; the field conditions the habitus, and the habitus helps to constitute the field as a valuable and meaningful world worth working in (Colley, et al. 2003, 478). The potters’ continual (or at least oft reoccurring) presence in each other’s lives helps to reinforce their shared identity. My focus, therefore, is on localized values which the Michiana potters trace to particular people and sites where they have worked and learned.

Of all the shared values listed at the beginning of this chapter, first let us turn to creativity, which may seem an obvious value for an artist to hold. This term is perhaps better understood as glossing for experimentation, or the acceptance of risk in the pursuit of new ideas. Certainly it would be

¹⁴ Colley, et al. also stipulate that “how to look” is part of the definition of vocational habitus, and I could delve into this further. However, the images included in this chapter already do much of the work for me: readers who look closely will notice that the clothing worn is practical, consisting often of jeans, t-shirts, and aprons, and clothing and skin is often marked with clay or glaze. Furthermore, discussions of appropriate clothing are so prevalent in technical literature and training that it seems unnecessary to recount here.

possible for those who do production work to continue to produce the same or very similar objects over and over again, and to make a good living doing so. However, the fact that so many of the potters value exploration and experimentation with their materials gives them a common ground for discussion, and an admiration for one another that is clear when they talk about their friends and mentors. Numerous times I have heard Michiana potters expressing their admiration for others in the group by saying something to the effect of, “I really appreciate his/her willingness to try new things,” with the underlying implication that trying something new is risky and does not always have useful results. When Marvin Bartel has told his students “try it and see,” he has done so knowing that the results could potentially be somewhat destructive or wasteful of materials, but that potentiality is balanced by the prospect of the student (and teacher, in some cases) discovering a new technical aspect of the material, or being driven toward a new expressive development in their work. Similarly, Cindy Cooper and Merrill Krabill both express the importance of having their students learn to develop their own ideas, and not just replicate what others have created. As professionals, this value of experimentation continues to be expressed by those who routinely take time out of their year – as Dick Lehman and Mark Goertzen recounted, and as many other potters do as well – to test new glazes and glaze combinations. While the results of these tests may not be immediately sellable and materials used in tests cannot be reclaimed, it is a worthy opportunity cost because it adds interest in the work for the potter, and it furthermore has the potential of leading to new designs that may be of value to clients and collectors. Additionally, the fact that many of the potters continue – well after their time as students or apprentices – to find the time and the funds to attend workshops is another testament to their desire to continue learning about their craft and to try new approaches.

Developing a sense of space is another clear theme in discussions about learning to become a potter, and one which may be unfamiliar to those who do not often create or work with substantial physical objects. Marvin Bartel provides the first example here when he discusses Jeff Unzicker’s first

large pot; Jeff's disregard for the next steps of the process and places (like doorways and kilns) where the pot would need to fit are both inspiring (as it is exciting to see a student experiment) and reflective of a common learning experience, since students must learn to plan ahead for the entire process and develop a sense of how pots will fit into existing equipment. The importance of planning ahead for space will also become clear in the chapter four discussion of sharing space in a wood fired kiln. Given that shared studio and kiln spaces are very common – students (and sometimes teachers) work together in college studios, mentors and apprentices work together in professional studios, guild members work together at the guild space and so on – it is also important that the potters in these environments are comfortable working closely with one another, and are able to negotiate using the space simultaneously. As Cindy Cooper, high school teacher and guild member, has described it, potters often feel a sense of community because they so often must “work on top of one another.” And, in this regard, it is certainly easy to imagine that one who does not desire to work in the company of others, or who is not comfortable with or adept at the social navigations necessary (taking turns with materials or equipment, developing shared standards for the care and cleanup of the space, potentially bumping into one another in cramped quarters, and so on) may be more likely to leave the shared space in question. Colley, et al. address this aspect of developing vocational habitus when they describe attrition from certain vocational training programs. Vocational habitus “is relational and dynamic, co-constructed partly by the dispositions of the students themselves as they construct their own identities. The vocational habitus must be a ‘choosable’ identity for the individual,” and thus when a student is not able to transform their personal habitus and orient themselves to the vocational habitus, they are likely to decide they are not right for the job and will often decide to pursue other work (2003, 488-489). This certainly points to the usefulness of a possible comparative study; interviewing those who have trained in the Michiana area and subsequently chosen to move and work in other areas of the world would likely provide further insights as to the kinds of values or work habits which are likely to pull one away

from this area. Developing a working space where one can work comfortably and efficiently is also crucial, as is reflected in Mark Goertzen's comments that Dick's studio "felt" right, and looked as he had imagined his own studio someday being; he lists this feeling for the space along with the development of friendships as being his main reasons for ultimately staying in Michiana.

Along with the ability to work in the same space yet on different ceramic projects, there is also the possibility of working collaboratively in order to complete a single pot or series of pots. This is quite common in apprenticeship arrangements, when the various tasks of creation may be divided among members of the studio; repetitive throwing of smaller objects like cups or bowls may be left to apprentices, while more complex decorative work might be left to the master potter, for example. Or, apprentices might mix clay and glaze, split wood, and help to load and unload a kiln, thus clearly contributing to multiple aspects of creation, while the creation of the studio's output of pots might be undertaken by another more experienced member of the studio. The work can be shared in many different formations, but in any case, there is a clear need for each potter involved to be comfortable handing the results of their work on to someone else, to have trust in the other(s) to complete their own work with skill, so that the end result can be one worthy of pride from all – to the extent that Dick Lehman has stated he feels the result was better than he could have created alone. While this arrangement is primarily seen at the Old Bag Factory studio under Dick and later Mark, and has contributed to the learning experience of many in the area, Justin Rothshank has also had a number of apprentices in his studio, where they work in return for the opportunity to learn from him and to have space to create their own work.

Justin also provides a strong example of another kind of collaboration in clay: when established professional artists combine their skills to create finished pots or sculptures that combine elements of both artist's work. Justin has coordinated with a variety of other potters to create in this way, both



Figure 3.19 - Pots made collaboratively by Todd Pletcher and Justin Rothshank, on display in Todd's studio in spring 2013.

locally, with potters such as Todd Pletcher, and further spread around the country; recent collaborations have included Eric Botbyl (owner of Companion Gallery in Tennessee, where many of the Michiana potters have been given the opportunity to exhibit their work), Brett Kern, Greg Stahly, members of Mudshark Studios (including Brett Binford and Cooper Jepperson), among many others.¹⁵ Often, the other potter will create the ceramic form using their own idiosyncratic methods, and then Justin will

¹⁵ Justin has also explored collaborations on objects other than pots. For example, he worked with Troy Bungart to create ceramic ferrules for Troy's brushes, and worked with John Geci to apply decals to blown glass.

decorate the surface with glazes and his distinctive decals. As discussed above, this kind of working relationship requires a sense of trust and an appreciation for the effects created by the potter with whom one works. The finished piece will be reflective of both individuals, and the hand of each individual who contributed to the piece is often clearly recognizable by pottery connoisseurs familiar with those artists; by choosing to work together, each person is indicating a willingness to be associated with the other in a rather permanent form. This format also requires the artists to work together to negotiate sales of the resulting artwork, agreeing on how (or by whom) the piece will be displayed or advertised, how the income will be divided between them, and so on. However, I have rarely if ever heard a potter express concern about sales of such work; the primary focus when discussing collaboration is generally on appreciating one another's work and having an opportunity to gain a new perspective on one's forms or decorative approaches via working with each other. Seeing the results from another person's input can be a great source of new ideas that can be later incorporated into one's individual work.

The concepts of frugality and efficiency also show up often when the potters discuss their approach to their work. Reusing materials in the Goshen College studio is common practice, and they are even planning to use the bricks of their old wood kiln to build a new kiln soon; many potters do this in order to avoid the expense of purchasing brand-new bricks, and also to avoid wasting any bricks from old kilns or factories which are still in usable condition. Merrill Krabill specifically tries to instill the value of "learning to work with what you have," knowing this will help his students later when they begin their careers. Marvin Bartell also expressed a concern for his students as they attempt to continue pursuing pottery after leaving college; being able to do so without needing to buy lots of expensive equipment is important, and this is one of the main purposes the Guild serves within the community. A sense of frugality is also reflected in Todd Pletcher's decision to never borrow money to establish his studio, instead working hard to make the money he needs to expand his facility. Efficiency is similarly



Figure 3.20 - This image approximates Mark Goertzen's view of his display area while he is working at his wheel. The sales counter is immediately to the left of this image, allowing him to easily step over to assist customers. August 2012.

important; any practice that is wasteful of time, money or materials can be detrimental to the potter's ability to achieve their goals. In this regard, Todd expressed his admiration for Dick Lehman and Mark Goertzen's studio practices, which he learned from while working for them at the Old Bag Factory. And, Dick has discussed some specific ways of implementing efficient practice in his studio, particularly his ability to create a semi-circular layout for glazing that is easy to navigate. Furthermore, the studio layout that allows the potters to continue working while also maintaining an awareness of their display space –

which allows them to quickly serve customers, either in answering questions, giving demonstrations, or making sales – is both efficient and frugal, since they do not need to employ a separate person to stay at the sales counter.

Service is another clear value within this community, often linked to the Mennonite faith and Goshen College. In *Mennonite Entrepreneurs*, Redekob, Ainlay, and Siemens address the seeming contradiction between an entrepreneur's goal of accumulating wealth and the traditional Mennonite commitment to the collective good. They suggest that while it may seem peculiar for those of the Mennonite faith to run businesses and focus on economic prosperity, doing so is rationalized if one's work can be viewed as a form of service to the community and a way of achieving collective goals (1995, 86-92). None of the Michiana potters have expressed any dissonance between their work and their faith; most note that finding ways to be of service to the community is a key part of their ceramic practice. Tom Unzicker's service trip to Africa was a crucial aspect of his entry into the world of clay, and Justin's community project in Philadelphia remains a strong aspect of his personal history with the arts. The Goshen Clay Artists Guild's soup benefit also provides much assistance to those in need in the Goshen area. Even Dick Lehman's discussion of selling clay at a loss to those who he mentored at the Old Bag Factory is an indicator of his willingness to sacrifice potential income in service of learning opportunities for those he mentored; he also regularly provided for his apprentices to attend ceramics workshops and conferences while they worked for him. Certainly teaching is a main form of service within this group; many directly take on the title of teacher or professor, while nearly every other potter has mentored apprentices and/or taught in the form of community classes or workshops.¹⁶ As Marvin

¹⁶ To provide a succinct list, this includes Cindy Cooper, Eric Kaufmann, and Len Cockman at local high schools, Marvin Bartel, Merrill Krabill, Bill Kremer at local colleges (along with Chad Hartwig and Zach Tate, who have worked at Notre Dame with Bill). Those who have taught workshops but are not included in the above list of teachers, to my knowledge, include Dick Lehman, Mark Goertzen, Justin Rothshank, Todd Pletcher, and Troy Bungart. There are many others who teach in the community as well, yet are less central to this text.

and Cindy have both expressed, identifying as both an artist and a teacher is a benefit; it not only provides an observable example of a working artist for students, but it also allows for teacher and student to build a deeper connection. Sharing their discoveries and excitement with one another is a value that goes much deeper than simply teaching technical skills.

I also cannot fail to mention that working in these communal spaces along with students or apprentices is a strong part of identity maintenance for teachers and mentors; while students are undergoing a process of “becoming,” those who teach are finding ways to express what they believe to be the best parts of themselves, intentionally foregrounding valued aspects of their identities as artists and potters in the hopes that these aspects will be taken on by those whom they mentor. And, as I have mentioned, even those who teach often find time to continue their own education through workshops or research into new processes; the education that happens within this network of potters is not linear, but instead is often complex and constantly occurring among members of the group with a variety of roles. This aspect of co-constructed identities and identity maintenance through teaching and learning is also quite important in the context of wood firing; although college students and those who are otherwise very new to wood firing often take part and learn quite a lot at firings, teaching and learning is not always straightforward and chronologically predictable. For example, it is not always true that the oldest or most experienced potter can tell the others how best to manage a wood fired kiln. Instead, it is more often the case that all of the potters who are present at a wood firing are, at that moment, learning about the kiln and the idiosyncrasies of that specific instance of firing, and each potter involved is likely to bring insights from their various wood firing experiences that will be relevant to overcoming particular challenges at particular moments in the current firing.

Chapter 4

The Michiana Aesthetic and the Collaborative Process of Wood Firing

When I arrived at Mark Goertzen's kiln on the morning of June 28th, 2013 – camera in hand, camera bag and notebook stowed away in a large tote over my shoulder – I immediately heard Bill Hunt's enthusiastic greeting: "Document us, Meredith! Document us!" Bill, a well-established potter and former editor of *Ceramics Monthly* magazine, was one the potters who had travelled a substantial distance (from Columbus, Ohio) to join the Michiana potters in this summer firing of Mark's kiln. His greeting, perhaps emphasized in jest, but genuine nonetheless, brought a smile to my face and a renewed energy to my work as I embarked on my usual routine of taking photos and asking questions about the progress of the firing. Some of us chatted casually about documentation that day, about the benefits of a "pseudo-outsider" (myself) whose main purpose is to systematically note all that goes on during a firing. It is certainly the case that potters can be great documentarians themselves (and indeed, the details of the firing are often recorded in firing logs and with photographs), but as a folklorist, my interest was in more than the mechanics of the firing. I was curious about the sense of community that I had observed in Michiana, and the fact that it seemed to center around an enthusiasm for wood firing.

It is generally acknowledged in the world of ceramics that collaboration is necessary in the context of long wood firing, and it was my awareness of that fact which led me to arrange a two-week research trip to Michiana in summer 2013, with the purpose of documenting two simultaneous wood firings in the area; an impressive feat, given the number of people needed to fire each of the kilns. What intrigued me most, however, were not the technical aspects of firing that the potters themselves do such a good job of documenting in log books and photographs of the pots (Fig.4.1). Instead, as a folklorist, I wanted to focus on the social dynamics that occur in this environment. In my initial



Figure 4.1 - Dick Lehman makes notes about the progress of the firing, keeping track of details such as the temperature and how much wood is being added to the kiln. June 2013.

conversations with the Michiana potters (at this point, I had completed six formal interviews in the area), I found that when I enquired as to why they pursued wood firing, they spoke of their enjoyment of the social and collaborative aspects of wood firing just as much as – if not more than – their appreciation of the aesthetics that could be achieved by this method. I found this particularly notable because it is not an aspect of firing that is ever addressed in-depth in the literature on wood firing.

As I already indicated in chapter 1, there is no shortage of documentation of wood fired pottery; the tremendous variation in methods and styles from around the world and throughout time has been

addressed in a variety of books with varying foci, from art historical perspectives to folkloristic perspectives, and, quite often, technical accounts aimed at an audience of ceramic professionals. Yet in all of these approaches, the focus is nearly always on the links between types of kilns, technical considerations, and resulting aesthetics: essentially, the exploration of what kind of kiln and firing process enables the potter to achieve the aesthetic qualities they personally prefer, and/or which are favored within their art world (to use Becker's terms). There is acknowledgement, certainly, that long wood firing is challenging and usually requires the potter to have assistance from others in order to fire the kiln for multiple days, but when I began this research project, I found there is really no critical analysis of the social engagement that occurs between potters during a firing event.

For example, Ben Owen is quoted in *The Potter's Eye* saying that long wood firing is a good opportunity to collaborate with other potters, to learn from each other, and to enjoy the camaraderie of working together (Hewitt and Sweezy 2005, 211 & 218). Yet within this substantial book about wood fired pottery, this is the only section of any significant length that discusses the appeal of the social aspects of wood firing. One place where I was able to find more personal accounts of social interactions around wood kilns is in *Wood Firing: Journeys and Techniques*, a book that brings together various articles about wood firing which had been published in the trade magazine *Ceramics Monthly*. Multiple articles in the book feature at least a paragraph or two about such aspects as the importance of friends and neighbors helping to fire the kiln, the hospitality involved in providing food or beverages to those stoking, and/or the discussions that happen in regards to making decisions about the firing process. Even still, in a book of twenty-five articles about wood firing I was astonished to find that only a fifth of the articles spent any time discussing communal aspects of the work (*Ceramics Monthly* 2001). Is it possible that the contemporary fine art world's focus on the individual artist has created this gap in the vocabulary used to discuss wood firing? Is this the result of the work of editors and publishers who find more value in texts about technical information than about social dynamics? Perhaps. While these

questions were not the focus of my research, they certainly stand in support of the value of a folkloristic study of wood firing; an approach which integrates both individual and social concerns, while still attending to process and aesthetics.

Another tremendous source of documentation of contemporary wood firing comes in the form of Coll Minogue and Robert Sanderson's book, *Wood-fired Ceramics: Contemporary Approaches*, which surveys wood firing potters (mostly in the United Kingdom, but also in mainland Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States). Most of the potters featured in the book tend to do shorter (10-12 hour) firings, and it therefore makes sense that there is less need for collaboration, and most do not mention having assistance with their firings. However, one section of the book features potters with "Oriental Influenced Kilns" and a tendency to longer firings – most falling in the range of 90-100 hours (around four days), with a few examples of week-long firings – quite similar to what can be found in the Michiana area. In this section of the book, "teams" of people needed to fire the kiln as well as the firing schedules or shifts that they use are almost always discussed alongside the technical aspects of the kiln and firing. However, only one potter's profile includes a further discussion of the kind of social navigation involved in a group firing: in the case of the kiln owned by Torbjorn Kuasbo, the authors mention that he prefers to have his pots in a certain place in the kiln to get particular effects, and thus others (colleagues and students) who are involved must place their pots elsewhere in the kiln (Minogue and Sanderson 2000, 79). Minogue and Sanderson's book also offers one final section on "Community Kilns," which offers a very nice breakdown of the possibilities for how such shared kilns might be organized:

In some instances the kiln in question has come into being as the result of the efforts of a committee or society, specifically formed for that purpose. In other instances, a group of friends – all potters – come together and build the kiln, on property belonging to one of them; or an individual potter has built the kiln alone (perhaps working slowly, over a number of years, as

time and finances allow), and then invited a group of friends to help fire it, subsequently forming a regular 'firing team.' In other cases, the kiln is to be found at an institution which provides facilities for adult education...

What all of these joint ventures have in common is a high level of commitment from those participating and an equally high level of satisfaction, which makes everyone involved in a firing look forward to the next one. Each firing provides an opportunity for a unique experience – not only is there a sharing of the physical activity, but there is also involvement in working towards a common goal. (138)

What follows in this section of the book (a mere five pages) is a brief description of a few community kilns, with very little detail shared about the groups involved. The book's focus continues to be on the type and size of kiln and general technical firing details, without information on the way the group of potters came together nor the social dynamics within the group as they fire together. However, the little that these authors do have to say is certainly in line with what I have found in Michiana – commitment and satisfaction, sharing of the work, looking forward to the next firing – yet it seems there ought to be more to say about precisely how these groups come together, how they navigate the shared work, and why they continue to work in this fashion. These were the kinds of inquiries which guided my fieldwork during wood firings in Michiana.

In comparison to the previous two chapters, which discussed the development of a sense of community within regional and educational contexts, this chapter is devoted to the analysis of a special, intense, collaborative event that the potters may share only a few times per year; while wood firing may not occur often, it is nonetheless quite important to the shared identity and social cohesion of the Michiana potters. My first objective is to explore how and why wood firing initially became popular among potters in this area, as well as how the practice has grown and changed over the years. The second section of this chapter moves into the present, exploring the aesthetic qualities that the Michiana potters currently seek to develop in the objects that they create, how those values move from

one person to another, and how and why those aesthetics are also recognizable in other, non-wood-fired pots created by this group. Of particular note regarding wood firing in Michiana is the fact that many of the potters in the area primarily sell pots which are made using other production methods (i.e. applied glazes and the use of gas or electric kilns), yet as a whole the group expresses a greater enthusiasm for the work and the results of wood firing. In many ways, wood firing provides a liminal space where the potters step away from their usual routines and participate in challenging, collaborative work that, in its intensity and uncertainty, forges bonds between individual artists. Physical challenges of wood firing will also be addressed in relation to this sense of liminality, since the shared embodied experience of the firing is often of primary concern to the potters involved, and thus plays an important role in the way they organize their work. Finally, this chapter will address the fact that many visual features of the “Michiana aesthetic” are aesthetic features sought by a broader group of contemporary potters and collectors who wood fire around the world; therefore, I will explore how the term functions for the potters as a way to evoke a feeling of community and positive collaboration, not simply a way to denote an exclusive visual effect that could not be achieved by outsiders.

The Beginning and Development of Wood Firing in Michiana

Tom Unzicker is often credited as being one of the first to spark an interest in wood firing in the Michiana area; Tom built a wood kiln in the area in the early 90s, and he, along with others like Mark Goertzen and Dick Lehman, all began experimenting and learning about wood firing around then. Mark Goertzen recalls this time, saying, “I wood fire because [Tom Unzicker] at Goshen College in the early 90s, very early 90s, was interested in wood fire. He probably influenced both Dick and I to be somewhat in the woodfire realm, because he built a kiln and we sort of learned all about it together, and then he kept building kilns around the area.” Marvin Bartel also recounts Tom Unzicker’s early interest in kilns, which came at least in part from a service trip to Tanzania after his freshman year of college. While



Figure 4.2 - Long-time friends Mark Goertzen (left) and Tom Unzicker (right) discuss the results of Mark's recent wood firing. September 2015.

there, Tom worked with women in a local village who wanted to develop a kiln and glazes to add to their traditional style of unglazed pottery. Marvin recounts that Tom had very little knowledge of kilns and glazes before embarking on the project, and soon wrote to his teacher asking for help. Marvin responded by sending a package of books and materials, and by the end of the year-long trip, Tom had helped to build a kiln and developed sustainable glazes from local materials which the women would be

able to continue to use after his departure. “He came back and knew exactly what he wanted to do. He was just totally committed to ceramics at that point,” Marvin says, speaking to the impact of the trip on Tom’s professional trajectory. Tom recalls that after the trip, he started looking more specifically at Japanese style kilns, and has since built kilns based on noborigama and anagama styles used in Japan.

When I spoke with Dick Lehman about his initial endeavors in wood firing, he recalled that, while he did have a small wood kiln, he did not actually find wood firing results to be very interesting at first – the results included a lot of browns, muted colors, and so on. However, he says he found inspiration to continue wood firing when his friend Jack Troy (a very well-known potter in his own right) showed him a catalogue: “There was one Japanese potter’s [wood fired] work that I just found astounding, because they weren’t brown pots. There were pinks and greens and blues and purples, oranges, yellows, golds. They were all natural, there was no applied glaze, long firings, 10-day firings, hotter temperatures than most American wood firers were doing.” What he had seen was a catalogue of Kanzaki Shiho’s work, and he eventually reached out and contacted Shiho. When they first started corresponding, Dick recalls that Shiho was beginning to learn English, and he was “tough to understand at that point, but I was highly motivated to get to know this man who made these remarkable pots.” Over the many years since their initial correspondence, Dick and Shiho have visited each other a number of times and have fired together and exhibited their work together, and developed a strong international friendship.¹ These factors explain much of the early interest in wood firing in Michiana, twenty to thirty years ago; it was a new style of firing to try out together, supported by Tom’s interest in building kilns, and at least on Dick’s part, there developed a results-oriented interest in the kinds of effects it could produce.

¹ Dick has written extensively in trade magazines about his friendship with Kanzaki, as well as other Japanese mentors and friends whom he has interacted with during his long career. An account of his publications (and the text of many of the articles) is available on his website: <http://www.dicklehman.com/html/writing/index.html>

The size of the wood fired kilns in Michiana, the volume of pottery fired in the kilns, as well as the length of the firings are constant sources of remarks from visitors who are unfamiliar with the process; they often find the scope of the endeavor quite impressive. Moreover, the scale is an important factor in why wood firing has become a collaborative rather than an individual practice in Michiana. Both Bill Kremer, long-time professor of ceramics at Notre Dame, and Dick Lehman both relate stories of the challenges of attempting to wood fire by themselves.² Bill, for example, tells a story of getting heat stroke while attempting a 24-hour firing alone one summer. “We had a wood kiln ... we’d always share it, there would always be a group, but there wasn’t much room in the kiln when you have 5 or 6 people putting their work in a small catenary kiln,” he says. So when he received a request for a number of large pots, he decided “I’ll fire this myself, I can do that, I’m not going to share it with others... It was in August, really hot, and I’m firing it along and it got to be, this was a 24 hour firing kiln, and you can drive in your car for 24 hours, right? And get somewhere. So I was firing and it was really hot, the kiln’s hot, and I’m starting to feel a little bit dizzy. Pretty soon, I can only deal with wood that’s up on top of the pile, I can’t bend down anymore or I might not get back up. I’m feeling a little nauseous.” He goes on to explain that his wife came out to the kiln that evening and thought he looked awful, and told him to go in the house for a nap; she and their two daughters would keep firing for him. “I remember going into the shower and I just felt this draining out of me, this awful heatstroke feeling. I got up, after I did sleep for awhile, and then it’s dark out and wasn’t so hot any more. And we managed to get it fired off. But it was, the next day I still felt bad, and I just thought well, I’ll feel better the next day. And it took a whole week!” Bill’s narrative is quite illustrative as to the benefits of a collaborative wood firing – having someone else

² Notre Dame is home to the other prominent ceramics program in the Michiana area (besides the aforementioned program at Goshen College), and the program has been headed by Professor Bill Kremer since it was established upon his hire in 1973. While this is an important source of ceramics education in Michiana, the Notre Dame students are not nearly so interconnected with the professional potters in Michiana as the Goshen students are; hence the lack of discussion of this particular program in the preceding chapter.

take over the stoking will, at the very least, provide the potter with an opportunity to cool off, rest, and recover, hopefully avoiding heat stroke, or worse.

Speaking to the appeal of firing collaboratively, Bill also talks about how his experiences firing the small wood kiln as a group led to his later decision to build a much larger kiln: “There was a real



Figure 4.3 - Bill Kremer poses beside his large wood kiln, along with some of his large wood fired sculptures. June 2013.

collegial, great interactive experience firing that [small] kiln. It was just a one day firing but it was probably one of the best experiences I'd ever had with ceramics, and it had to do with that kiln – arguing about how to fire it, drinking a lot of beer, staying up all night. So I decided I would build a wood kiln... I decided to build something that was much bigger than I could fire myself" (Fig. 4.3). The kiln Bill Kremer now has is about 30' long, and he often mentions that it is large enough for 20 people to comfortably sit inside and use it as a sauna (while it is not being fired, of course). Later in our conversation, he added, "It was a great idea, it was really a good thing to do, because every year we have this real coming together, I always look forward to it." To my knowledge, Bill and his group of Notre Dame students and Michiana potter friends – a constantly varying group – have never missed an early November



Figure 4.4 - Bill Kremer helps to stoke his kiln, along with many of his friends and students. November 2015.

firing of the kiln over the 17 years since it was built (Fig. 4.4). Though Bill's students from Notre Dame do not often make their homes in Michiana after graduating, his presence has still been a tremendous influence on the Michiana community. His current assistant at Notre Dame, Zach Tate, attributes much of this influence to the diverse group of potters and artists Bill has worked with over the years (including notable ceramic artists like Peter Voulkos, who once came to fire the large wood kiln), the stories that Bill enthusiastically shares about his experiences, and of course, the fact that his huge wood kiln draws in a large crowd of area potters and friends for a firing every fall. At one time, he also fired the kiln in the spring, an idea which Bill has recently begun to revisit after a particularly successful firing in the fall of 2015.

In his own attempt to wood fire mostly without assistance, and still with great results, Dick Lehman was able to develop a kiln and firing process for wood firings that were between a week and fifteen days long, yet which he could manage, for the most part, by himself; a feat for which he is well known in the broader world of American ceramics. Over the years, Dick had built two different small, cross-draft kilns that could be fired quickly and without much ash accumulation, and he had come to the realization that he was not satisfied with the results. He truly wanted to create pots with "the luscious flow of natural-ash glazes in a wide spectrum of colours" that resulted from days-long wood firing processes. However, "Certain real and genuine limitations stood in my way. I really didn't have the money to purchase some property where an anagama-style kiln could have been built (and I was reasonably certain that my neighbours would not be agreeable to seeing a giant anagama growing out of my diminutive kiln shed). And if I had had the property, I would not have been able to afford the materials to build an anagama (or to take the time to scrounge for the materials)... let alone, I worried, the skill to build and manage such a large kiln. But worst of all, the time requirements of my commitments (to my wife and children, to my production studio, to my employees, to my customers) seemed to preclude the possibility of regularly spending eight days in a row firing a kiln, instead of

working in the studio,” (Lehman 1999, 17-18).³ Despite these limitations, Dick still found a way to build a kiln that fit his needs. The small kiln Dick ended up with – a modification of his existing cross-draft kiln – had a huge firebox, which he could stoke himself only about five times a day, putting in a huge amount of wood that would slowly burn until the next stoke. “My thinking at that point was, okay, I’ve been through the parenting thing, I know how to get up and do the night feedings, I can do this,” he recalled with a laugh during one of our interviews. “So in theory I could keep working at the pottery studio and be firing my kiln for as long as I wanted. I would schedule the rest of the firing, the final three days, for a Friday, Saturday, Sunday,” since the last few days needed more regular stoking at 10-15 minute intervals, and therefore required not only greater attention from himself, but assistance from others, as well. As for the results? “The effect was a snow-storm’s worth of dry ash on the pots from that pre-heating. That would melt... just building up massive amounts of ash on these pots. And suddenly I was making the kind of pots that I’d most admired... And here I am doing it in my side yard in Indiana, and working at the same time. That’s been my approach to things, to see if there’s a way to do more than one thing at the same time,” Dick states.⁴ Even given how successful the process was, it is notable that these beautiful results could not be achieved without family and friends to help finish the firing over those final 36 hours.

Additional kilns have been built in Michiana over the years, and today wood firing is something that a majority of the area potters are engaging with in some fashion; some have their own kilns and routinely fire two to three times a year (or more often, when they are able), others only occasionally make work and participate in a firing hosted by another potter. Two of the main kilns operating in the area in recent years (leading up to and during my fieldwork in 2012-2015) are those owned by Mark

³ Note: this magazine is published in Australia and the spellings used in the article have been retained in the above quote.

⁴ Dick discusses this balance in his work (between his production line and wood firing) in much more detail in his article, “Side Firing: Where the Life Is” (Lehman 1996).



Figure 4.5 - The potters who participated in firing Mark Goertzen's kiln in summer 2013 pose inside the kiln for fun after it has been unloaded. Clockwise from top left: Mark Goertzen, Todd Pletcher, Scott Lehman, Todd Leech, Anna Corona (bottom right), Stephanie Craig, Bill Hunt, Dick Lehman, Royce Hildebrand. July 2013.

Goertzen and Justin Rothshank. After firing with both Tom Unzicker and Dick Lehman in the 90s, Mark decided to build his own kiln on his property about 10 years ago. The kiln, fondly called “Dante,” is a catenary arch kiln large enough that Mark usually relies on at least 2 or 3 other potters, if not more, to help fill the kiln with pots and to fire with him (Fig. 4.5). “That kiln has always been about community,” he says, referring to the fact that he both built it with the help of others (both potters and non-potter friends), and always fires with the help of others. For Mark, like many others, the partnership is also with the kiln, and he sees it as an active participant in the creation of his work: “I do like that interplay of doing as best as you can and then offering it over to the fire,” he says; in giving up direct control of the pot, he strives for “more of a collaboration with the kiln itself.” Collaboration, both with the kiln and with other potters, is a constantly reoccurring theme in the Michiana discussion of the wood firing process.

Another locus for wood firing collaboration in Michiana is Justin Rothshank’s kiln, which was built in 2010 (Fig. 4.6). Justin’s approach to wood firing as a social endeavor is quite clear when he writes about his kiln: “I have a 2–chamber wood kiln, with the rear chamber for soda. I fire it 3–4 times a year. I chose to build a large-ish kiln because of my interest in working with other regional clay artists. The wood kiln is a way for me to connect with other makers. I usually fill the rear chamber with my own work, and share most of the front chamber with 4–6 other artists who are interested in wood firing. Each firing can hold 300–500 pieces so there’s plenty of space to go around, and ample time for exchange of ideas and community building,” he stated in a recent article in *Ceramics Monthly* (Rothshank 2014, 27). He mentions these benefits often when we talk about wood firing, and he has also described to me the fact that his wood firing network stretches out well beyond the Michiana region, too: “I have been fortunate to have friends from Pittsburg and Missouri and Michigan who have come to help both build my kiln and fire my kiln,” he says (though a local faction is nearly always present at the kiln as well). And, undoubtedly, Justin’s connections both near and far have helped to expand the

wood firing possibilities in Michiana. During our first interview in the fall of 2012, Justin lamented the small group (only five people compared to a usual fifteen or more) that had been on hand for his most recent firing, attributing the deficiency to a firing of Mark Goertzen's kiln the previous month. As soon as the next summer, however, the two kilns were fired simultaneously - each of the firings in summer 2013 were lit on the same Thursday and shut down on the same Sunday, and both locations had approximately 10-15 potters directly involved, plus even more friends on hand to help with the stoking. The volume of people and work involved speaks clearly of a regional enthusiasm for the process, as well as the power of the Michiana tradition to have drawn participants from throughout the Midwest.



Figure 4.6 - A group of potters work the overnight shift at Justin Rothshank's kiln during the summer 2013 firing. June 2013.

While such enthusiasm may not be infinitely sustainable – indeed, smaller firings involving just four or five potters have occurred since that monumental summer of 2013 – there are other signs of a growing passion for wood firing in Michiana. Len Cockman, who teaches art at Northridge High School in Middlebury (about a 20 minute drive to the northeast of Goshen) has built and fired a small wood kiln with some of his students. Moey Hart, owner and manager of Northern Indiana Pottery Supply in Goshen, has made plans to work with Goshen College on rebuilding the old Goshen wood kiln (originally built and run by the Unzickers and other students in their time) on his property, for the students to use. His good friend, Troy Bungart, will undoubtedly be involved in the project as well; Troy is very dedicated to exploring wood firing, and has put forth a great deal of effort to attend and participate in wood firings at as many kilns around the country, traveling as far and as often as he is able. And, as I mentioned in chapter 3, Todd Pletcher built his own wood fired kiln in the summer of 2015; at the time of this writing,



Figure 4.7 - Todd Pletcher's newly built kiln, just before being unloaded. September 2015.

he has already fired it at least four times in the six or so months since it was completed (Fig. 4.7). Todd's kiln is currently the only down-draft train kiln in the area, and it is different from other kilns in the area in that it holds less work, fires in a shorter time, and offers more predictable firings. While his kiln still has some areas where the pots get a great deal of ash accumulation, it also produces rather different effects than the other kilns, including rich reds and oranges, and a more distinct front (with more significant ash deposits) and back (with very little ash) to the pieces. This variety was part of Todd's reason for building the kiln; having the opportunity to try something different is appealing when there are already a number of established kilns in the area.

There have also been other changes within this group, and some kilns and people who were once active are no longer. For example, in the early 2000s Tom and Jeff established Unzicker Bros. Pottery in Thorntown, Indiana, a small town quite a bit to the southwest of the Michiana region. There, they had a 900 cu. ft. kiln which they would work together to fill and fire about 3 times per year, rarely including other potters' work. While their distance from the Michiana community meant they were less involved with the group, they were still near enough to maintain significant friendships and to visit regularly. In fact, Tom and Jeff were both included in the inaugural Michiana Pottery Tour in 2012, where they exhibited their work on Mark Goertzen's property. Soon afterwards, though, Tom moved to Newton, Kansas with his family because his wife received a job offer there. He has now established a new studio and wood kiln, and a number of the Michiana potters have already gone to visit his new place. However, the even more extensive distance means he will have less presence among this group, particularly compared to the early days of Michiana wood firing.

It is also worthwhile to note that Dick Lehman no longer has his own wood kiln (his kiln was taken down over ten years ago, and the bricks were reused by Mark Goertzen in building his wood kiln), yet he still remains one of the most active wood firing potters in the area. He is involved, to some extent,

in nearly every wood firing in Michiana, particularly when they are spaced far enough apart that he has time to make a substantial body of work. Being constantly in the role of visiting participant rather than owner of the kiln, however, has somewhat changed Dick's approach to wood firing. He says there are both benefits and detriments to this situation; missing the kiln he once had, and lacking control over the firing process can be major downsides, but at the same time, he appreciates the opportunity to observe and learn from such a wide variety of firing approaches. "others say that a wood-fired kiln is like a sailboat—the very best wood kiln is the one that belongs to someone else who lets you ride around in it once in a while," he writes, alluding to the additional responsibilities and work that come with ownership (Lehman 2014, 26). His primary advice to other itinerant firers is to ask many questions prior to participating, with the intention of making sure the experience will be a good fit; he recommends asking about the site and maintenance of the kiln, when and how the wood is prepared, the process used for loading and firing, the atmosphere at the firing, the unloading process and results, and more, to ensure your own preferences and expectations will fit in with that of others. Dick also explains that a big part of his own approach to this experience is to take a wide range of his own work, knowing he "will have some works in the least desirable areas of the kiln." He therefore brings both unglazed and glazed pots, some pieces augmented with additional ash, colorants, or fluxes, and pieces made with a variety of clay bodies, so he is well prepared "to accommodate a variety of kiln zones and environments" (Lehman 2014, 28). After many years of wood firing with a variety of kilns and firing groups, Dick is obviously quite adept at navigating the different kiln environments that his pots may encounter; his calm and compassionate demeanor, along with his impressive ability to remember personal details about every person he meets, are also noticeable benefits to the social atmosphere around the kiln when Dick is a participant.

“More is More:” Shared Aesthetic Ideals Among Michiana Potters

Three of the largest area kilns that the Michiana potters circulate amongst – those of Mark Goertzen, Justin Rothshank, and Bill Kremer – were all built with community in mind, as the potters have attested. All three of these kilns also have the ability to produce somewhat similar results, particularly regarding heavy natural wood ash deposits, glossy glaze surfaces, and a tendency to cooler rather than warmer colors. The fact that so many of the regular participants who fire these kilns appreciate those aesthetics is no coincidence; their shared ideals allow them to fire together easily since they are all hoping to achieve similar results, and therefore have similar ideas of how to run the kilns in order to produce those results. As Howard Becker states, “An art world has many uses for an explicit aesthetic system. It ties participants’ activities to the tradition of the art, justifying their demands for the resources and advantages ordinarily available to people who produce that kind of art” ([1982] 2008, 132). Furthermore, “a coherent and defensible aesthetic helps to stabilize values and thus regularize practice... An aesthetic, providing a basis on which people can evaluate things in a reliable and dependable way, makes regular patterns of cooperation possible” ([1982] 2008, 133). Just as students or apprentices who do not like the work environments they find in a particular place are likely to move elsewhere to work (as discussed in the previous chapter), those who do not like the social atmosphere around the kilns and/or the results achieved from the firings are likely to move themselves into different ceramic circles where they *are* enabled to do the kind of work they wish to pursue. It is for this reason that I tend to focus my writing on those members of the group who have been involved the longest; while newcomers certainly play an important role in the vitality of the group, they are often still in a stage of experimentation, seeing whether the region has the right fit for their own idiosyncrasies. Many students and apprentices have come and gone over the years, many potters have visited for a wood firing on occasion, but those who have chosen to settle in the area are the most central to the continuation of the tradition, both socially and aesthetically.

Artistically- and visually-oriented readers may have already begun to develop their own understanding of the frequently-pursued aesthetics in Michiana through the images of pots that have been included in this text thus far. Still, at this point it is worthwhile to take a closer look at those aesthetics, and to offer some definitive descriptions of the visual qualities being sought. While most potters in Michiana primarily create the familiar forms of functional pots, there is a balance struck between the similar and dissimilar; the soft, earthy colors and juicy runs of ash from wood firing decorate a variety of forms, as each potter makes his own unique mark in clay. Some vessels stand stoic and symmetrical, while others speak more of fluid and motion, some surfaces made smooth and clean, others punctuated with pattern and texture. Indeed, a variety of palettes and sizes abound, but if you look closely, you can find the influence of teachers and friends, firing styles and shared kilns.

Trained under many of the same masters with years spent working in the same region (if not in the same workshop) viewing and admiring one another's work, it is no wonder many of the Michiana potters share similar aesthetic values. Similar clays, forms, surface decorations, and marks of shared kilns flow from one potter to another; not copying but venerating aspects of the work they admire in others, taking it in visually and tactilely, and allowing it to infuse their own work in new ways. Certain visual similarities are quite obvious; the most obvious seen when a wood firing is unloaded and pots are laid out on the ground mimicking the order in which they sat in the kiln (Fig. 4.8).⁵ Then, the work of many potters appears as one entity, a large gradient of colors and effects changing just as the flow of the ash changes from the front to the back of the kiln, the fire affecting each person's work in similar ways in similar areas of the kiln. In this moment of contemplation as the potters view the results of their

⁵ This practice is not standard among all wood firing potters, but has been done at every unloading of Mark Goertzen's kiln that I have attended, and has also been done at Todd Pletcher's kiln. It is a useful method to see where different effects occur in the kiln from front to back, but some potters may instead rely on photos taken in the kiln before unloading each shelf or stack of pots (either due to personal preference or due to lack of appropriate space in which to lay out the pots in this manner).



Figure 4.8 - Pots unloaded from Mark Goertzen's kiln are spread out on the ground nearby. September 2015.

work, they often compare notes on clays and glazes that have afforded them the most pleasing results, sharing with one another inspirations for future experiments. That which is successful for one potter is perhaps not widely advertised, but neither is it a secret closely held; methods and recipes are often

gladly shared with close friends who will respectfully turn them to their own purposes. Friendship between potters involves respecting one another's style, and, rather than attempting to duplicate exactly the pots or effects achieved by others, each person tries to expand and elaborate upon their own style by utilizing small aspects of the work they admire.



Figure 4.9 - Pots made by Tom and Jeff Unzicker sit in their studio, awaiting the next wood firing. April 2012.

The cohesive aesthetic shared by many of the Michiana potters goes beyond the simple explanation of shared clays, recipes and/or processes. For example, Tom Unzicker explains how he and his brother Jeff have run their business quite individually, each person making what they desire, yet a shared aesthetic within their studio has developed as they worked together for over 10 years, and many clients cannot tell the difference between their products (Fig. 4.9). “When you’re working with someone that closely in the studio, over years, you’re not even sure where ideas come from anymore, they just bounce back and forth,” Tom says. “I’ll see Jeff doing something and I’ll add that, and then he’ll take it back and do something better with it, and it goes back and forth,” he describes. Tom’s explanation for the process of developing a shared aesthetic is also quite fitting for those working in closer proximity to one another in Michiana; even those who do not work in the same studio together often visit one another, and have the opportunity to see each other’s work often, particularly at wood firings.⁶ A similar visual style found amongst the work of these many potters is not intentionally maintained, per se, but it can reflect their close working relationships over the course of many years, their respect for one another’s work, and their shared values in the creation of pottery. Occasionally, decorative practices developed during apprenticeship make their way into the later works of a production potter who has set out on his own. Eric Strader uses slip trailing that is similar to that which has been used in Dick Lehman’s production line, which Mark Goertzen has maintained but also developed and made his own. Patterns cut into Todd’s popular yarn bowls are reminiscent of patterns still cut into open vessels at Goertzen Pottery. There is also the more recent influence of Justin’s decals, which (as mentioned in chapter 3) other potters in the area are beginning to experiment with. In many ways, the layered and complex visual surface that Justin creates with decals echoes that which many strive for in wood fired pots:

⁶ Their collections of one another’s pottery also plays a large role in the maintenance of this aesthetic, an aspect of the community which will be discussed in detail in chapter 5.

similar to layering on ash, there is an underlying philosophy that “more is more,” at least when “more” is done well, and with careful consideration of the resulting effects.

Many qualities are shared amongst pots made within “the Michiana aesthetic,” a phrase coined by Mark Goertzen as he observed the shared preference for lots of layering on of ash, striving for glossy pots with running or drippy natural ash glaze, and a desire to achieve additional colors (particularly in the blue/grey/green range) which go beyond the shades of brown for which wood firing is often known. “I’ve always had a blue kiln,” Mark says regarding the results he is able to get in most of his wood firings. Todd Pletcher often fires with Mark and Dick Lehman, and mentions an appreciation for similar traits: “Especially Mark’s last few [firings], the beautiful blue ash that you get. It’s different from traditional Japanese style work, you get the browns and the reds with sort of the yellow and the green ash runs from the pine, but Mark and Dick were – Dick in particular before he tore his kiln down – getting really great blues and greens, and that’s what I’m always going for.” Dick also adds his observations that the



Figure 4.10 - Detail of a squared bowl by Mark Goertzen, with the gray, blue, and green ash runs and crystal formations often sought in Michiana pots. May 2013.

Michiana aesthetic tends toward complex surfaces: beyond layering and dripping ash, the potters often attempt to achieve crystal formations in the natural ash glaze, and strive for additional coloration such as pinks, lime or apple greens, purples, and violets. It is worthy of note that Dick's descriptions of wood fired effects are nearly always metaphors for entities found in nature; sunsets and glaciers, flowers and crystals and rivers adorn his beautifully poetic descriptions of his work.⁷ Often, these results come about due to the Michiana potters' willingness to attempt firings that are longer than necessary to reach temperature: with enough time and wood available, they will choose to hold the kiln for many hours at around cone 6 because at that temperature, fly ash from the burning wood will gather on the red-hot, sticky surfaces of the pot. While many of the Michiana potters speak of inspirations drawn from Japan wood fired pottery, Dick Lehman explains "the Michiana Aesthetic at least leans away from the Japanese 'less is more' aesthetic," and tends to embrace a "more is more" philosophy (Lehman 2014).

Acknowledging that his generation of potters has been greatly influenced by Japanese pottery, Dick once explained in an interview that "I think as a body of potters, ceramic artists in the States are, they're not disconnecting, but they're finding their voice and they're not just trying to make Japanese brown pots." The idea of side firing pots is another technique used by Dick Lehman and now popular amongst many of the Michiana potters. Dick believes the Japanese potters began using shells due to their chemical properties and easy availability. Many observers are surprised to learn that, after being fired in a kiln, the previously impermeable seashells will easily dissolve in water due to the chemical change that takes place at high temperatures. They are, therefore, a great means of creating an easy release between the pot and the kiln shelf, or the firing stand that the potters make to hold up the shells and pots (Fi. 4.11). Now, these shells have shifted to a more decorative function in side firing and

⁷ For a particularly profound insight into the aesthetics Dick has been able to achieve in his work, see his article "Toward a Vocabulary for Wood Firing Effects" (2004).

beyond; Dick indicates the prevalence of a “willingness to frequently reorient the axis of pots during firing, allowing for side-firing, upside-down-firing and ‘somewhere- in-between-those-two-orientations- firing,’” (2014). The unique decorative patterns made by sea shells adorn many of the pots now made in Michiana; and once again, we see experimentation is a prevalent theme in the work made by these potters. “The results achieved by side firing may be process-driven, but they are always just a little out of control – and often just a little more intoxicating than they would be if all the variables were to be under my control. I consider the process of producing this side-fired ware to be as much an act of receiving as an act of making...” Dick has written (Lehman 1996). While shells are a prevalent part of Dick’s work with side firing, he and the other area potters acknowledge that getting shells can be a challenge when living at such a distance from the ocean. However, their willingness to seek out these



Figure 4.11 - This side-fired piece by Dick Lehman is still on its tripod stand with shells, having just been removed from the kiln. July 2013.

resources speaks to their devotion to pursuing these effects. Furthermore, in an effort to localize the side-firing process, Dick has spent quite a bit of time investigating and experimenting with different methods of supporting the pot for side firing; although he has not yet found a replacement that works as well as the shells for releasing from the thick drips of glaze, he has many ideas that he will continue to pursue.

Experimentation with the aesthetics of wood firing also has an effect on the wider bodies of work that these potters create. Many of them find that they are able to derive new ideas for their production lines (or other styles of work) through the results of the wood firing. An article quoting Dick gives one of the best explanations of this interplay:

Over the years, the nonproduction ware and the production ware have definitely supported each other. For example, the skill and facility that I have developed as a production potter – being able to make the clay do what I wanted it to do - have made it easier to make any new forms that I might imagine for the specialized firing approaches. If I had an idea, I could essentially make it; I had the skills to make it.

Out of the risk-taking in the nonproduction pieces, sometimes forms or ways of making would make their way back into the production line. Big spirals with a rib, for example, started with side firing and made its way back into some of our products in the production line. Always when I am working, but especially when I am making nonproduction things, I have an eye out for how what I am doing would influence or improve the production ware. I tend to think that most of the movement was from the nonproduction ware to the production ware. However, most things I made in the nonproduction ware were functional. I did not make very much what I would call pure sculpture, or things that weren't at least derived from function. (Hartenberger 2013)

Dick is not the only one to benefit from concurrently creating multiple styles of work, however. As I noted in chapter 3, Mark Goertzen has made some changes and additions to the production line at the Old Bag Factory since Dick's time there, and one of the effects he pursues are more dripping, runny glazes. Mark describes how there is a direct link between his pursuits in the production line, and his

work with wood firing, saying: “I get ideas for the wood firing and all of a sudden it will show up in the production work. I try to keep a good number of one of a kind work going, so that I evolve.” For example, forms and surfaces that work well in wood firing may also look good with drippy applied glazes used in the production line.

Todd Pletcher has also discussed how refreshing wood firing can be, as it often leads him to incorporate new ideas in his production line of pots, which is generally fired in an electric kiln; he tends to create more unique objects for wood firing rather than the long runs of identical vessels that he makes for his production line, and he often tries variations of the forms and surfaces in order to best take advantage of the flow of wood ash within the kiln. Sometimes, variations that he has used for his wood fired vessels then begin inform the design of his production line. He knows this happens among other potters as well, and describes, for example: “Justin often says that the wood fire works for him as a way to sort of experiment, and drive some creativity into his production line. I utilize it in the same way in terms of how it affects my production line. The wavy line, for instance, was something that I was playing with specifically for wood firing, that I liked enough to start incorporating into all of my work” (see Todd’s work in chapter 3). Always open to change, the Michiana potters are not afraid to “try it and see,” as Marvin Bartel would say, and the wood firing is a crucial influence in this.

Collaboration in the Wood Firing Process

In order to understand the deep social significance of wood firing within this group of potters, one must understand the intense and challenging process of wood firing, particularly the knowledge and preparation, technical skill, and physical labor that are necessary for a successful wood firing. As I describe this process in the following paragraphs, it is useful to think of the wood firing as a kind of liminal space where the potters step away from their usual routines and participate in collaborative work that forges bonds between these individual artists (and a more direct analysis of the liminality of

this event will be provided in the next section of text). Wood firing is something that may happen, for these potters, only a few times per year. And – this is a key point – currently none of the Michiana potters are making a living solely selling wood fired pottery. Those Michiana potters who work in clay full time usually have an additional production line where they make glazed and electric or gas fired wares, and this is often where the majority of their sales come from.⁸ However, when you speak with them about their art, their greatest enthusiasm is for the wood fired work, and they put a great deal of time and effort into making sure wood firing continues to be a part of their production.

The preparation of making pots for the wood fire may take place over the course of weeks or months prior to firing, and this part is largely an individual endeavor. The potters then shift into a collaborative mode when they bring their work to one person's kiln and begin to navigate the kiln loading process together (Fig. 4.12). Often up to five or six potters will fire their work together, and while the owner of the kiln or the more experienced potters may get preference as to where their pots are placed, overall they must arrange works so that the entire kiln is evenly loaded and conducive to the movement of the flame. And, at the same time, each individual pot should be carefully placed so that the ash will fall onto it in the manner the potter desires. From the point when the kiln is loaded to the moment it is unloaded and all is cleaned up, the overall process may take up to three weeks: loading can take hours or may occur over the course of a few days, firing can take anywhere from a few days to a week, cooling the kiln again takes a matter of days, and unloading requires a similar amount of work and time to that taken with loading. Considering that all of the potters involved need to schedule time away from their usual activities producing pots, as a matter of convenience the wood firing activities (loading,

⁸ The dichotomy I suggest here of production line and wood fired work is a broad generalization and is not found among all potters who pursue wood firing.



Figure 4.12 - Many potters help to load Justin Rothshank's kiln before a firing. June 2013.

firing, and unloading) are often spread out over three to four successive weekends. This kind of weekend schedule is a great accommodation for those who must attend to their regular jobs through the week, but it can also be a challenge for those who travel from afar to be a part of the firing; driving a substantial distance three weekends in a row is often not temporally or financially feasible. Therefore, more distant participants may choose to ship bisque ware to be loaded into the kiln without their presence, or may choose not to attend the unloading, instead picking up finished work at a later visit (or having those pots shipped back to them). In any case, the weekend-oriented arrangement is much more conducive to regular local participation.

As for the specifics of the firing: often, the kiln is warmed overnight or for a day or so, keeping the temperature around 200-300° to ensure the pots are dry and warm. Then, a more substantial wood fire is lit and built slowly over a few hours; often this occurs in the morning on the first day of firing, and is done by the first shift of potters (though it is quite common for many others who are involved in the firing to attend the lighting). Finally, the fire will grow much stronger and the potters will begin gaining temperature much more quickly. By then, the kiln takes almost constant supervision and must be stoked approximately every ten to fifteen minutes until it reaches an overall temperature of around 2200° or more.⁹ Although it is possible to reach the necessary temperature for a complete firing in only a day or



Figure 4.13 - The red-hot interior of Mark Goertzen's kiln, mid-way through a firing. A partially melted cone pack can be seen toward the bottom left. August 2015.

⁹ For those who are more familiar with ceramics, it may be of interest to know that the Michiana potters tend to attempt to achieve cone 12 in the front of their kilns, and at least cone 10 in the back. When they hold temperature for ash accumulation, they may attempt to do so around cone 6 to 8, though of course, all of these details can vary substantially depending on the idiosyncrasies of each firing.

so, most of the Michiana potters are relying on natural wood ash glaze to develop the complex surfaces on their pots, and only sometimes do they apply any glaze prior to the firing.¹⁰ Therefore, the potters will often choose to hold the kiln at a lower temperature (perhaps around 2000° or lower) for many hours or even days to allow the wood ash to build up on the surface of the pots; it will then melt and drip down the pots once higher temperatures are reached. Not only is this process time consuming; the fire is consuming impressive amounts of wood, as well. A three-day firing might use around six cords of wood (and the wood must be split, yet another task often undertaken by the potters). To understand the scale of the fuel used and work needed to split this much wood, one can consider this comparison, offered by Justin Rothshank: the same amount of wood burned in a wood stove could easily heat a moderately sized home throughout the winter months (Fig. 4.14).



Figure 4.14 - This image shows only a portion of the huge amount of wood needed for a long wood firing. June 2013.

¹⁰ The most common application of glaze is a “liner glaze” on the interior, which provides a smoother, functional surface on the inside space where little ash is likely to fall. This is particularly common on forms like cups or mugs.

To manage the long hours of a firing, which often occurs over three or four days in the Michiana kilns, the potters who have contributed work to the kiln will work in groups and stoke the kiln in approximately six-hour-long shifts. These are often divided into an early morning, midday, evening, and overnight shift, though schedules can vary depending upon availability; many also choose to drop by outside of their designated shift, or stay long past their required hours. Friends and family gather as well, keeping the potters company, helping to split wood, and sometimes taking their turn stoking the fire. Typically, each scheduled shift overlaps the shifts that fall before and after for a matter of hours, providing a sense of continuity; the overlap allows the new crew to hear about the previous shifts' goals to hold or raise the temperature, get a feel for the kiln and the rhythm of the stoke, and so on. For example, Bill Kremer says he prefers to have three on a team who take six hour shifts, and halfway through their shift new people come on: "by the time I leave, you'll have picked up the feel of the kiln, understand what the cycle is, they'll be watching the dials and get a sense of what it is. The kiln is always changing, it never stays the same. Just when you think you've got it figured out, you don't," he says, speaking to the necessity of paying close attention while on shift. The schedule of six hour shifts with three hour overlap is also very common at Mark Goertzen and Justin Rothshank's kilns, as well.

Mimicking the apprenticeship structure, the wood firing offers another opportunity for mentoring within the pottery community. Those who own the kilns tend to take the lead, as their familiarity with the kiln runs the deepest. Occasionally a different kiln boss is chosen; sometimes Dick Lehman has run a firing of Mark Goertzen's kiln, for example. In either case, well before the firing can begin, it is the kiln boss or owner who goes through the process of inviting participants, setting a schedule, and organizing shifts for stoking. Just as the energy of apprentices is utilized to increase production in the studio, during a firing the "young bucks" are often relegated to the challenging overnight shifts. Though they may complain about the late hours and lack of sleep, they often revel in the opportunity to make their own choices while stoking the fire, feeling a bit rebellious outside of the

direct supervision of the more experienced potters.¹¹ During most shifts, if a decision about the firing cannot be reached communally, the group will often defer to the wisdom of the kiln boss or the most experienced potter present; even in this relatively democratic process where decisions are continually discussed and often reached as a group, there remains a subtle structure of leadership.

Through these many aspects of the process, wood firing functions to bring together a group of potters and friends who have a vested interest in the success of the firing. However, not all moments are devoted to stoking the fire, splitting wood, or discussing the firing; there are also many quieter moments between stokes that can be filled with conversation and camaraderie. Often accustomed to working individually in their own studios, taking part in wood firing gives the potters an invigorating opportunity to converse with others in their profession during the many hours of loading, shifts of stoking, and labor of unloading the kiln. While pottery is, of course, a main topic of conversation, the potters also tend to share many of the same hobbies, and they will often delve into a variety of topics of common interest around the kiln. All of these aspects of social interaction play into the development of a strong sense of community among the potters, a quality of wood firing that becomes even more explicit when analyzed through the lens of liminality.

¹¹ Of course, it is not always the case that enough younger potters are available to take the overnight shifts; sometimes, this is the least desirable shift among the group. I have also observed situations where the kiln owner will be the one to take on the additional challenge and responsibility of staying up overnight to care for the kiln.

Wood Firing as Liminal Space

The concept of liminality was first introduced by Arnold van Gennep in relation to his study of rites of passage. He claimed that rites of passage mark the movement of an individual (or group) through particular phases in their lifecycle, and suggested that all such rituals have a three-fold structure, including the pre-liminal (rites of separation), liminal (rites of transition), and post-liminal (rites of incorporation) (van Gennep [1909] 1961). The idea of liminality was then taken up by Victor Turner decades later. Turner proposed that these in-between periods offered a time of withdrawal from one's usual sense of identity and modes of social operation, and therefore served as a time and place of great ambiguity, out of which new perspectives could arise. Furthermore, with the breaking down of established structures, a sense of spontaneous *communitas*, or feeling of togetherness and community, could form between participants who were together undergoing this transformation (Turner 1969). Over the years, the idea of liminality has been applied to moments and groups of varying scales, to encompass many different kinds of periods of change. In applying "liminal space" to wood firing, I am here specifically using the term to indicate an event with a defined temporal and spatial frame, involving certain processes and patterns of behavior which are usually present, along with a sense of the unknown and of challenge undertaken as a group. As described above, wood firing is clearly a time of intense change – for the pots, most clearly, but also for the potters, since they are working in anticipation of a new body of work, and simultaneously developing new or deeper friendships, and new insights into the wood firing process.

There are, of course, certain contrasts with how the concept of liminal space has been presented in the past. For example, wood firing could only rarely be considered a rite of passage. While the first firing that a potter participates in is often remarked upon and given special attention (particularly in regards to educating them about the process and training them to stoke appropriately), it



Figure 4.15 - Mark (left) and his assistant Royce (right) stoke the fire. Mark often has assistants from his shop take shifts at his firings, and he is careful to train them on how to properly stoke the kiln. June 2013.

is not often a key element of the event. From my observations of the Michiana group, however, I can say that having participated in wood firing is a definite prerequisite for one's centrality to the Michiana pottery community; those who do not participate tend to be on the outskirts of the network, not as well connected as others who do routinely wood fire. Having experienced the intimate physical challenge of stoking the fire, one becomes a part of the group. Dorothy Noyes expresses a similar sentiment in *Fire in the Plaza* when she explains, "I had but to participate as they did. I could have their experience by living in their bodies, and I could do this by eating what they ate, dancing what they danced, and, in general, by spending time with them: acquiring a history in common with them" (2003, 31). As a researcher of wood firing – and in a similarly inexperienced position as some of the potters' apprentices – I felt the need to participate in the stoking, and thus appreciated the benefits of acceptance into the group.

While “wood firing as rite of passage” is not quite the appropriate analytical approach, wood firing can be seen as a kind of ritual, if not necessarily in a religious or spiritual sense.¹² For example, some kiln owners in the Michiana area have distinct rites through which they begin or end a firing. Mark Goertzen always has a special bottle of bourbon which is opened and shared among the participants at the point when the fire is lit (Fig 4.16). He pours a small drink for each person and then a small offering into the kiln, saying, “May this warm your stomachs, and my stomach, and Dante’s stomach,” referring to the fire that will soon blossom in the belly of his kiln, Dante. The bourbon bottle stays at the kiln site throughout the firing, and if any is left at the end, it is often shared among those who are there to close up the kiln when the firing is over. As kiln boss in summer 2013, Dick Lehman made a similar offering of espresso, brewed at the kiln site in a travel espresso maker. Sake offerings, left atop the kiln in a ceramic sake cup (in a similar manner as would be done in Japan), have also been made at Mark’s kiln. Similarly,



Figure 4.16 - Mark hands out small ceramic cups of bourbon to those who will help fire his kiln. August 2015.

¹² While Bill Kremer often speaks of a definitive link between wood firing and religion, and additional potters do profess a sense of spirituality in regards to the kiln and the process, many take a much more secular and pragmatic approach; it would be inappropriate to impose a sense of religiosity upon all participants.

Bill Kremer recently ended one of his firings with a special offering to the kiln; he has a very large spoon made by Peter Voulkos which he filled with salt and left sitting above the front arch of the kiln throughout the firing. At the very end of the firing, Bill and the others usually salt the kiln to add to the effects of the wood ash, and after copious amounts of salt were placed in the kiln at each of the stoke holes, the salt from the spoon was ceremoniously tossed in during the last stoke (Fig. 4.17). There are other notable similarities to van Gennep's original use of liminality; his tripartite structure, for instance, fits loosely with the threefold loading, firing, and unloading aspects of the firing: during loading, the potters both leave their daily routines and begin to give up control of their pots as they are placed in the kiln; during firing, they work together in a relatively democratic process of stoking and making decisions about the firing, and they are clearly aware of the transition their pots are going through; during unloading, the pots are unveiled in their new, final form and the potters begin to accept the results of



Figure 4.17 - A very large ceramic spoon full of salt and a sign saying "Just hot enough!" over the arch of Bill Kremer's kiln. November 2015.

the firing, deciding how they will incorporate these pots into the body of work that they display, and simultaneously incorporating their new knowledge of the process into their aspirations for future wood firings.

The sense of transition and ambiguity that both van Gennep and Turner discuss in the liminal phase is quite easily applied to the clay objects included in the firing, since firing is a volatile process and pots may not survive or turn out to the potter's liking. Furthermore, the potters feel a close kinship with the work they have put into the kiln, and therefore also encounter their own sense of transition during the firing. The work that they get out of the kiln will in many ways determine what they do next; will they have pots they love to display and sell in upcoming shows? Conversely, will they have to cope with



Figure 4.18 - (Left to right) Bob Smoker, Fred Driver, and Justin Rothshank look over the results of the recent firing of Justin's kiln. July 2013.

a lack of wood fired inventory? Will the experiments they try in this kiln turn out well? Will they find new inspirations, and thus find themselves making modified forms in preparation for the next firing? All of these questions and more remain unanswered as they strive to fire the kiln to the best of their ability, consistently stoking the fire, trying to make the best possible decisions about how often to stoke, when to rake the coals, whether more air or less is needed, and so on. Throughout all of the intense physical and mental work demanded by the kiln, each potter hopes they are making the best possible decisions within the idiosyncratic circumstances of that particular firing. Changes in the weather (humidity, atmospheric pressure, and so on) can affect the trajectory of the firing. Conditions of the wood (drier or recently cut wet wood, hard woods like oak versus soft like pine) can change how the fire burns. Too much air means oxidation (areas in the kiln where the pots may turn white and the ash glaze surface will not achieve the rich colors afforded by reduction), but still, air is needed for combustion and cannot be cut off too much. On and on, a cascade of decisions to consider, to discuss with others around the kiln, while the possible results of the firing – the result of the pottery's transition, and thus the transition of each of the potters – weigh in each person's mind.

A key part of the firing experience, Bill Kremer believes, is the state of mind that occurs while firing: "One of the jokes with that kiln is, how many times are we going to have to fire this thing in order to finally get it to where it is... well, the ideal [exists] when we're firing it. Everyone has high hopes, expectations, and that's why we gather together, and that's why we're, it's almost like a religion or something and that's the chapel. Of course, once we unload it there'll be a few good things, but [at that point it is] just another firing, so to speak." At that point, with the firing completed, the potters shift



Figure 4.19 - Mark Goertzen (left) and Troy Bungart (right) discuss the firing between stokes. August 2015.

their focus to the next firing, to another opportunity to pursue the ideal, and begin discussing plans for the next firing; when to have it, what new ideas they will try. In Bill's description, every stage of wood firing is always oriented to the future; he states often during the firing, "we are living in the ideal," or perhaps "living *for* the ideal." Prior to and during the firing the main consideration is the future results that will be attained, and after the firing, once those results have been seen, the potters' thoughts are immediately consumed with planning the next wood firing, with an eye to achieving even better results the next time. Mark Goertzen also expresses a similar sentiment about how each firing fits in with other firings: "The enjoyment of wood firing is also the puzzle of it. Since nothing is guaranteed look-wise, that's the fun of it. How this firing will go in the puzzle, and who gathers, and talking about how we should be firing it, that's all fun for me," he says (Fig. 4.19).

It is crucial to note that the dynamic of uncertainty and attentiveness to the future does not only concern the individual potter's relationship with his or her own pots. Turner's concept of *communitas* is also quite relevant, given the heightened sense of empathy, friendship, and camaraderie which tends to be present around the fire. As this is a collaborative endeavor, with the pots of friends, colleagues, students or apprentices also included in the kiln, each potter also feels a great empathy for the others involved, particularly since their fates are linked. Too many mistakes during firing could mean every potter participating leaves with poor results and negative feelings, just as a really successful firing can generate great pots, good sales, and additional enthusiasm for working together in the future. And smaller interactions during the overall firing can be just as meaningful; if someone has a great insight that solves a problem, their reputation or social status can rise a bit within the group. On the other hand, if someone does not show up for their shift, they jeopardize their relationship with friends or mentors who are relying on them. Or, if wood is thrown into the firebox with too much force, it can hit the stacks of shelves and pottery, knocking over and breaking the work of many potters. Due to the significance of these and other individual actions to the fate of the entire group, a sense of togetherness is heightened as each potter understands his potential to affect all others who are involved.

Given their consistent attention to these details of the firing, whatever shared sense the group has about the likely outcome of the firing, whether positive or negative, always affects the mood of the present. When the firing appears to be going well, group decisions can seem easier, and conversations can turn to topics external to the firing, discussions of new designs for forms, of family or friends or current events, often jokes and laughter, lighthearted moments shared around food or beverages (Fig. 20). Yet when the firing stalls, when temperatures do not rise as predicted (or if they drop) or concerns arise about conditions within the kiln, the atmosphere among the potters becomes more serious, with quiet moments of contemplation around the pyrometer or the kiln log, low, earnest voices discussing the possible solutions, stories shared of solutions found in past firings (Fig. 21). In either case, whether



Figure 4.21 - Mark often makes wood-fired pizza for his guests at a wood firing. Here, he is in a particularly good mood because the firing has been going well. August 2015.



Figure 4.20 - Bill Kremer (left) and Dick Lehman (right) study the pyrometer together under the rare circumstance that the kiln is firing hotter in the back than in the front. November 2015.

positive or negative, friendships are deepened through these conversations and experiences, as individuals share personal details about themselves, finding commonalities both in ceramics and in other aspects of their lives.

Physical aspects of firing are also key to the sense of community and empathy developed at a firing; given the extreme heat of the fire, consequences such as burns, heat stroke, and dehydration must always be kept in mind. And, since all participants take part in the stoking, they have a shared, embodied understanding of the extreme heat and sense of urgency that is felt as you step up to fuel the fire. As I explained in chapter 1, when the potters open the door of the kiln to add wood to the fire, extraordinarily hot flames rush out of the kiln toward the potter(s) who are stoking. Though they dress

in protective gear to mitigate the heat and danger, they are still subjected to intense heat and usually find that they can only stoke for brief periods of time before feeling as though they are risking bodily harm. The urgent, instinctual reaction to step away from the fire and avoid injury is counteracted by one's knowledge that the fire must be stoked, one's duty to the group and the kiln must be completed. Thus you stay at the fire and complete your task, and you know that when others take their turn at stoking, they, too, have likely felt this same struggle and have chosen duty over instinct. Burned clothing is common, and underlying a conversation about one another's burned sleeves is a sense of proximity to the fire, implied but not spoken: "I have reached into the kiln, and so narrowly avoided burning my skin!"



Figure 4.22 - Justin's long sleeves, long pants, and leather gloves help to protect him from the fire as he stokes. June 2013.

The idea that intense physical experiences lead to a feeling of empathy and community among participants is well supported in anthropological and psychological studies of ritual. A prime example comes from recent research published by anthropologist Demitris Xygalatas. Building on Durkheim's notion of collective effervescence,¹³ Xygalatas and his colleagues' 2008 study of the *paso del fuego* (fire-walk) in San Pedro Manrique, Spain, involved tracking the heart rates of both fire-walkers and spectators. During the fire-walk, participants walk over hot coals, often carrying a loved one in their arms. The study found "an astonishing level of synchrony in heart-rate activity, extending from fire-walkers to spectators of the event... the closer the social ties between two people, the more their heart rhythms were synchronised." Xygalatas goes on to compare the *paso del fuego* with the Hindu religious festival Thaipusam in the Republic of Mauritius, which involves body mutilation and piercing. There, the researchers found a direct link between the amount of pain experienced by the participant and/or perceived by the observers, and the amount of money they would thereafter donate to charity; the more pain, the higher the donation (Xygalatas 2014).¹⁴ Overall, Xygalatas concludes that "Empathic reactions to the suffering of others and the joint experience of suffering forges strong communal bonds. As the Spanish fire-walkers told me, when you perform this ritual, 'everyone is your brother. The next day, you see another fire-walker in the street, and you know you've been through this together, you've bonded, you have a different relationship to this person.' The cumulative effects of this transformative process can cement the social fabric of these communities. Collective arousal plays an important role in shaping social behaviour and identity." Furthermore, while he acknowledges that "social cohesion is not the conscious goal," Xygalatas' studies show that it is a major benefit garnered from many kinds of

¹³ The idea that, when a tribe or society comes together to perform a collective action, they will feel a sense of unity (and concurrent loss of individuality); for further details, see Durkheim's The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life ([1912] 1995).

¹⁴ The article cited here is intended for a more general audience. Further scientific details of the fire-walking study can be found in "The Fire-Walker's High: Affect and Physiological Responses in an Extreme Collective Ritual" (Fischer, et al. 2014)

physically challenging rituals (2014). While his research focuses on religious rituals which purposefully entail a great deal more pain or bodily harm than a typical wood firing, the mechanisms at play are remarkably similar. Shared physical challenges lead to empathy among participants, and the sense of community felt around the kiln is a major benefit to the group. Although the analysis regarding liminality and embodiment is mine, the idea that wood firing is a source of community cohesion among potters in Michiana is broadly acknowledged among participating potters.

Those who are familiar with contemporary wood fired pottery in America will likely notice that the aesthetic, physical, and social qualities of wood firing described in this chapter are not completely unique to the Michiana area. Long wood firing is always a challenge, and the effects sought and achieved – including side firing, heavy drips of melted ash, even the wider variety of natural ash glaze colors – have been successfully pursued by those outside of the region. Indeed, a regionalist approach can only go so far in the assessment of visual qualities appreciated in Michiana, both because these are not completely unique to the place, and because there is still quite a lot of variety in the works produced by area artists. Each potter has his or her own preferred forms, textures, and so on, and even though these are often influenced by others in the area (as was explored in chapter three), each artist maintains a distinctly individual style.

So, why refer to the “Michiana Aesthetic?” It is perhaps best to think of the Michiana aesthetic as a reflection not just of visual qualities, but also of community: the participants have shared values, as previous chapters have established, and because they seek at least *similar* visual results, they have the ability to fire a kiln together in a way that, when successful, will produce results that all participants will be pleased with. It is perhaps even more profound to point out that the aesthetics being pursued in Michiana have much more to do with social aspects than they do with geography. As those who have studied folk arts are often well aware, the aesthetics found in places such as North Carolina or Japan are

often closely tied to the natural resources, such as clay or shells, which are available in the area.

Certainly, the Michiana potters could choose to move to places where they could dig local clay or pick up shells from a nearby ocean, yet they remain in this place because the social connections they have here are more important, and the material resources they need can be brought in from elsewhere. The use of the regional designation, Michiana, in the definition of their aesthetic reflects the fact that, for potters like Dick, Mark, Justin, Todd, and more, this is where their main artistic influences and friendships lie. They choose to be in this area because they can work with people whom they respect and care about, and their aesthetic preferences and artistic processes have been, in most cases, deeply influenced by those people.

Chapter 5

Collection Practices: Maintaining the Aesthetic

My interest in potters' collections goes back to an interview that I conducted in 2012, when I asked Dick Lehman to describe to me the people or styles of pottery that had been most influential in the development of his personal style of pottery. After mentioning the influence of his first (and only) ceramics professor, Marvin Bartel, and publications such as the trade magazine *Ceramics Monthly*, he listed as one of his main influences the collection of pottery that he had acquired from other artists: "I reasoned that surrounding myself with the good work of others was another facet of my education, since I didn't really have one," Dick said, referring to the fact that he was a religious studies major rather than an art student in college. "And that has resulted over the years in a pretty significant collection of work. I've largely stopped collecting at this point... I'm just not buying much anymore. I'm starting to see the downside to a collection is, how do you dispose of it? That became a little more focused during, since my [lymphoma] diagnosis in 2004. There were points along the way when I wasn't quite sure I was going to live, and so, all of those end of life questions, you know. Is this going to be a problem for someone? Is it going to be an asset?"¹ After mentioning this concern in the interview, though, he soon reiterated: "I figured that if I surrounded myself with enough beautiful work, I might make more beautiful pots," (Lehman, 2012). Dick had indeed amassed a substantial personal collection, including some of his own best pieces, works by artists he admires, and works by his many former apprentices.

¹ Fortunately, as mentioned in a previous chapter, Dick has been in remission for some time now.

The inquiry that follows in this chapter is primarily concerned with the role of this kind of collecting in the lives of contemporary artists, particularly potters. For the purposes of this text, I will define 'collecting' as the practice of physically bringing together various resources into one's personal space, typically the home or studio. Specifically, I will look at how pottery owned by these artists constitutes a primary resource for the development of new artwork, as well as the development of the professional and social status of the potter. While intangible or less-tangible collections (via images, sketches, or online sources) often serve similar functions as creative resources or as a means to reify social connections, I intend this chapter to primarily focus on the importance of collecting, displaying and utilizing tangible pots (with one small deviation into the possibilities of online display). I will then briefly follow the line of reasoning that Dick has set forth, and look at what can happen to these pots after they move out of the hands of the initial collector, and I will address how small, private collections can move into the public sphere, particularly when they are brought into museum collections.

Why do we need to understand artists' collections of artwork? The answer is multifaceted. Of interest to art historians, museum curators, and others involved in the collection, preservation, and display of artwork is the fact that so many contemporary artists are collectors, and they may often have substantial collections which could eventually be donated or sold to art museums and similar institutions, and thus will enter the public record.² As many in the field have lamented, when looking at historical works of art one is often faced with a tremendous loss of information; lack of provenance, no knowledge of how a piece was made or by whom, where it was made or which archaeological dig it was found in, and so on. The contemporary potters whom I work with, however, tend to view their personal collections as just that: intensely personal, and therefore reflective of many interpersonal relationships.

² This is precisely what Dick Lehman has recently chosen to do with much of his personal collection, in large part, as a result of the end-of-life concerns mentioned earlier. His collection will be discussed further in a later section of this chapter.

And, without a doubt, this is true for those who work in other mediums, as well. They know when and where they have purchased pieces or received them as gifts, they know who made the piece and (usually) which techniques were used, and with this knowledge they would be able to provide a strong written record that could be preserved along with the artwork in their collection. The problem, I believe, is that so much of this information can seem very straightforward and easily traceable in the present. However, if it is not recorded along with the collection of objects it will become more and more obscure as the years go by. Artist-collectors (as I will demonstrate here with the case study of potter-collectors) therefore represent an ideal opportunity to work in the present towards having a more complete historical record in the future. This chapter is not intended to provide an exacting, pot-by-pot provenance for any particular potter's collection, but it will provide examples of the kinds of information that can be gleaned through discussion with potters about their collections.

To further the argument, a study of artists' collections provides a strong counterpoint to the famous collections brought together by wealthy patrons of the arts, which make up so much of the art historical cannon today. As I discussed in the first chapter, while these elite collections do have their place in our understanding of fine art through the ages, such collections may tell us only about the aesthetic preferences and social relationships of one or two wealthy people; they often tell us relatively little about the everyday lives of the middle or lower-class people who make up the majority of the world's population. Going forward, therefore, it is valuable to find ways to expand the record to embrace those who may not previously have been included; inquiring into the collections of artists is a key way that we can both further the written record regarding specific pots. Finally, and perhaps the most important reason I argue that we should pay attention to artists' collections, is that by examining the collections that these potters have gathered into their lives (alongside a study of the art that they are engaged in producing), we can elicit a much deeper understanding of their values, their social networks, and their creative processes. While these kinds of meanings are more difficult to elicit when

working with historical records, contemporary artists are present and able to speak directly to the value of these collections in their everyday lives. Thus, by asking questions about how a collection represents aesthetic ideals, friendships, artistic kinship, and so on, we can find we have a wonderful opportunity to understand the context in which a potter creates great work.

Similarly to previous chapters, the following discussion of contemporary potters' collections draws on my own fieldwork in Michiana, but here I have also broadened the study to incorporate other written records of the lives and work of contemporary American potters, in order to analyze two main roles of contemporary American potters' collections of pottery: I will consider both how the collected works constitute a primary visual and tactile resource for the development of new works, and I will analyze how the act of collecting and displaying collected works can function as a resource for the development of the social and professional status of the potter. I will begin with the potter's collection of his own work, and then move outward, following the social life of the object.

Collecting One's Own Work

The example that falls closest to home, so to speak, is that of the potter keeping his own work. Art historian Krzysztof Pomian defines a collection as, "A set of natural or artificial objects, kept temporarily or permanently out of the economic circuit, afforded special protection in enclosed places adapted specifically for that purpose and put on display" (1994, 162).³ This is indeed the case when

³ This definition, while useful in this analysis of potters' collections, is problematic when applied to the broader world of collecting. For example, objects in collections can have huge economic impacts for collectors, museums, museum-goers, insurance companies, and more, even when they do not physically circulate. Furthermore, collections can and do circulate, passing from one owner to another through various means, or being sent out on loan from one institution to another. The ways and means of display vary so greatly dependent upon the collector's circumstances that it is, perhaps, too broad to say that this latter part of the definition applies directly to all of the examples that follow even in this text. Nevertheless, Pomian provides a useful place to begin in considering the nature of a collection.

potters intentionally choose to set aside examples of their own work, preventing those pieces from entering economic circulation. It seems, from my observations, that pieces on both ends of spectrum of quality are often kept in the potter's possession; successful personal works may be kept as representations of an ideal and as a resource for future creations, while pieces seen as flawed and/or those works that lack economic value in the current art market are often kept out of circulation, thereby helping to maintain a positive public reputation.

On one end of the spectrum, personal work judged to be of high quality is sometimes kept due to a sense of pride, as a representation of an ideal, and as a resource for future designs. As was previously mentioned, one of Dick Lehman's techniques for inspiring new work involves surrounding himself with good work; while he primarily speaks of this in terms of collecting works from other



Figure 5.2 - Wood-fired pot, approx. 12" tall, by Dick Lehman. Side one. Photo courtesy of Dick Lehman.



Figure 5.1 - Pot by Dick Lehman, side two. Photo courtesy of Dick Lehman.

potters, over the years he has also kept a large number of his own pieces which he viewed to be particularly successful. He finally decided to part with a portion of this personal collection in 2014, when celebrating his “40th anniversary of pottery-making,” and simultaneously raising funds to support the construction of his new studio. In a mass email sent to promote the sale, he commented on his collection: “I have saved the very best until the very end [of the sale]... Here are pieces that have inspired me over the years of my making. Some have been in my personal collection for almost a decade... others, for a bit shorter period of time: all are among my favorites.” In a later message, he hinted at their value, noting, “These are large and major works....they cost a bit more...but you save more as well. Perhaps these will qualify as “important gifts”...for parents, siblings, children...dear friends and colleagues...or perhaps even to treat yourself.” The works featured in this special sale (such as the one shown in Fig. 5.1 and 5.2) are some of the more expensive offerings from Dick, often costing around \$1000. Dick has often chosen to keep these pieces aside as representations of the ideal he is striving for as a potter, and the description of this piece (Fig. 5.1 and 5.2) that he included on his website is particularly illuminating as to his personal attachment to the work:

All-natural-ash wood-fired surfaces always seem to outstrip even my most hopeful anticipations... running ahead, pointing the way, revealing new faces, and somehow reintroducing me to my very best self.

This large jar was side fired for 15 days in my wood-fired kiln. I used Chinese Elm from our property that had been blown over in a big storm. On this pot are the salt and metallic salts that these Elm trees had soaked up from our very soil... making a natural ash glaze never to be duplicated. This is about as ‘domestic’ a pot that I can make.

The piece was sidefired on sea shells. One of the wads holding the sea shells is firmly fixed to the surface of the piece. For a while, that chunk of clay bothered me... the piece wasn’t ‘perfect’... but after living with it for a bit, I have come to see it as genuinely PERFECT, just like it is.

The range of colors and crystals, and naturally-produced glaze so beautiful... a gift from the firing... colors and textures I've never reproduced since taking down the kiln almost 15 years ago.

"This has been a 'keeper' for me... now it's time for it to find a new home. (Lehman 2014)⁴

Although he has now sold a large portion of this personal collection, Dick still continues to keep some of his own idealized work as both a reference point and a point of pride.

Dick is not the only one to participate in this kind of activity. For example, at the unloading of his wood fired kiln in summer of 2013, Mark Goertzen pulled out a large vase which he and his wife were both extremely pleased with, and they immediately began to discuss their desire to keep the piece for



Figure 5.3 - Large vase by Mark Goertzen, immediately after unloading from the kiln. September 2014.

⁴ All ellipses in these quotes have been preserved from the original statements written by Dick Lehman. No edits or abbreviations have been made from his original email and website text.

themselves rather than selling it (Fig. 5.3). As I described in the previous chapter, the results of the wood ash falling and melting onto the pots are quite unpredictable, and exact effects (such as thick drips and runs of this natural glaze, or crystallization of the glaze) are challenging to achieve. Therefore, pieces that come out of the kiln with exceptionally good results are particularly coveted. “Of course,” Mark noted at the time, speaking generally about some of the pieces he keeps for inspiration, “the question is whether to keep them at the studio or at home.” In other words, which location is a more useful place to keep a high-quality piece which offers inspiration for future work? Mark often spends more than forty hours per week in his studio in Goshen, Indiana, where he and customers could view the impressive piece, but he likewise spends much of his time at his home in Constantine, Michigan, where he, his wife, and their visitors could enjoy viewing and using his work. Indeed, both locations are well adorned with his work and that of other potters. What further emphasizes the impact of keeping some of his own best work within his own space are Mark’s remarks approximately a year after many of his pieces were purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Haan for inclusion in their museum.⁵ “I feel a big loss,” he said during a 2015 firing of his wood kiln, expressing his hopes that the newly completed work would be up to his standards. “I’m hoping some good things come out [of this firing] so I can live with some again. I really do miss them.” Fortunately, many great pots were produced in that firing, which not only provided Mark with new work to sell, but also enabled him to renew his personal collection.

Many potters whom I have interviewed tend to keep works in both their studios and their homes, often utilizing functional wares for functional purposes. More often than not, visitors in a potters’ kitchen are served beverages in the potters’ own handmade cups and mugs; I speak here from experience, since this has often been the case during the course of my fieldwork. Dick Lehman, Marvin

⁵ See the section titled “Collecting for Public Display” later in this chapter for further details on this museum.

Bartel, and Todd Pletcher were some of the first to invite me into their homes and serve me beverages in cups and mugs they had made themselves. And, potters themselves often eat off of their own wares on a daily basis. North Carolina potter Mark Hewitt, for example, discusses having lived and worked with Michael Cardew, who had many pots in his home: “we got to know what Michael’s favorite pots were and why,” he says, emphasizing the importance of living with and talking about the work (Mecham 2009, 61). Mark now makes a habit of living with and using his own wares, as evidenced by an image illustrating Hewitt’s essay in *The Individual and Tradition*, which is captioned: “The table set with Mark’s stoneware in the home of Mark and Carol Hewitt, Pittsboro, North Carolina,” (Hewitt 2011, 465). The usual explanation offered for this – a method which many of the Michiana potters have mentioned – is that using functional ware is the best way to evaluate it; a potter might make a few samples of a new form, and then use them himself or with guests in order to elicit feedback on the comfort and functionality of a new form. Making a few pieces for purposes of evaluation is different, of course, from making a large set of one’s own dinnerware which, on the other hand, can reflect a sense of pride and a desire to utilize (and demonstrate to visitors) the fruits of one’s efforts.

It is important to note, however, that potters do not only keep their own works when those pieces fit within an artistic ideal that is generally accepted within their broader art world; some pieces may be appreciated and kept by the potter even when they lack economic value within the current art market. While this does not necessarily mean the potter views the piece to be of poor quality, it often does reflect their knowledge of their customers’ preferences. For example, at the unloading of Justin Rothshank’s wood fired kiln in the summer of 2013, I was able to observe the great enthusiasm expressed by many of the potters involved as they pulled pots out of the kiln which were covered in thick, rough deposits of mostly unmelted ash. “Crusty!” they would exclaim, referring to the rough, unmelted ash surface (Fig. 5.4 and 5.5). While these are not the kinds of pots one will usually see displayed for sale at the Michiana Pottery Tour, they were still sometimes coveted and kept by the



Figure 5.4 - "Crusty" pieces unloaded from Justin Rothshank's wood fired kiln. July 2013.

potters, who recognize that these works might not have a high economic value. Indeed, attempting to sell such a "crusty" piece might damage their reputation amongst a customer base which they have built based on their ability to produce works often described, in contrast, as "juicy" (referring to the thick, smooth, glossy, colorful drips of glaze that can be achieved in a long wood fire). However, the rough and crusty pieces do have value among the potters who are interested in the chemistry of the technique, and who wish to explore the full repertoire of effects that can be produced by a wood fired kiln, even when those effects might include rough surfaces that are not, to many consumers, as pleasant to handle.⁶ Often they will seek out these thickly coated, "crusty" pieces by placing work in the firebox of the kiln, where more of the ash from the burning wood will gather, sometimes burying pieces that have been set off to the sides.

⁶ It is sometimes possible for a potter to re-fire pieces that do not come out of the kiln as desired, with the hope of melting the ash (and adding more ash), ending up with a pot that is up to their usual standards. However, this can be risky and re-fired pots will often break in a second firing, which also puts nearby pots at risk for damage.



Figure 5.5 - Additional "crusty" pieces, both covered in a thick layer of un-melted ash, from a firing of Mark Goertzen's kiln. September 2014.

While a cursory glance at the idea of collection indicates the simple idea that objects are chosen for their appeal to a person and likely reflect personal aesthetic ideals and high economic value, a collection can, upon deeper analysis, reflect much more complex choices and deeper cultural values. As described in the above discussion, potters often choose to keep pots that they find visually and technically appealing, sometimes doing so even if those pieces do not fit a broader aesthetic ideal shared by their customers. Becker addresses trends such as this when he says, “judgments of value not held jointly by members of an art world do not provide a basis for collective activity premised on those

judgments, and thus do not affect activities very much” ([1982] 2008, 134). Therefore, it is understandable that while “crusty” results may be of interest to individuals in the group, those included in the broader art world do not seek out such results, and therefore Michiana wood firings are still aimed at producing “juicy” results. The primary outcome when results like this are produced is a change in the individual potter’s personal collection; pieces kept in the home or studio, admired, but not as likely to be utilized for serving food or beverages.

When looking beyond personal works that are kept, however, a consideration of pots made by other artists further complexifies the act of collecting. This category includes items given as gifts and mementos of special occasions, pieces kept as samples from admired artists, works that serve as representations of creative kinship (i.e. teachers and students), and pieces used as a means of forging a deeper connection with other artists, often through display or even via the financial support which I can be supplied via the purchase of the pot. All of these potentialities will be discussed in the remaining sections of this chapter.

Gift-Giving Among Potters

The first example to consider regarding collected objects which were made by other artists is perhaps the most intimate: that of objects exchanged amongst artists who have collaborated in various capacities and have close personal relationships. Trading pottery of similar size and/or value is a common practice among potters, and is often a means of growing one’s collection. Potters also give one another gifts of pottery quite often. Giving gifts during and in relation to wood firing events is, in some ways, the epitome of this method of collection-building. Among the potters whom I have worked with in Michiana, giving gifts around the kiln is a prevalent means of expressing appreciation for the assistance given and new connections made during the firing. Often these gifts are in the form of pots, or small amusing figures left at the kiln site, but the exchange of goods around the fire also extends to food, t-

shirts, photographs, and other tokens of friendship.⁷ The exchange of pottery is particularly relevant to this chapter since these gifts often can contribute heavily to the collection of pots owned by a potter. These gifts may serve as artistic inspirations and representations of an ideal aesthetic (similar to the pieces of his own work that a potter might keep); however, having been chosen by another person to be given as a gift, their presence in a potter's collection is more likely to reflect the perceptions of the giver rather than the recipient.⁸ Additionally, while these gifts may sometimes serve as creative resources, often they have a parallel purpose in representing a variety of social connections, and the exchange of such gifts can serve numerous social functions.

I have often observed these kinds of exchange in the course of my fieldwork, particularly at wood firing events, and the kinds of work exchanged there can be loosely divided into three categories: 1) completed works that are good representations of the potter's personal style or of the results of that particular firing, 2) works from the firing which have fused together in interesting ways, and 3) pieces made at or specifically for the wood fired kiln which now serve as kiln decorations. Generally, these kinds of exchange do not involve a monetary aspect since, most often, these items are given as gifts. For the most part, these gifts are given as mementos of friendship, as physical markers of the ephemeral experience of having together overcome the challenges and joys of firing a wood kiln together.

I was not fully a participant in the firing of Mark Goertzen's kiln in the summer of 2013, since I was not on the shift schedule and had no work of my own included in the kiln, but the potters accepted

⁷ Of course, the purpose and emotion behind a gift can be much more complex, a point proven clearly by Marcel Mauss' seminal study, The Gift (not to mention those scholars who have followed in his footsteps) (Mauss 2000[1954]).

⁸ A useful comparison can be found in Robert Georges' article "You Often Eat What Others Think You Are: Food as an Index of Others' Conceptions of Who One Is," which explores the social dynamics of serving food to guests, and how the host's perception of the guest's preferences often prevails over the preferences the guest would have expressed, were (s)he given the opportunity (Georges 1984).

me as one of the group; my purpose was to document their work, to gain a deeper understanding of the process of wood firing and the social interactions entailed in that situation. While in some ways an outsider, I was present at the kiln nearly as often as any of the potters who took shifts in the firing. I also helped to stoke the kiln, and stayed later than necessary on more than one night to talk with those who were on shift. Therefore, I was included in many social exchanges around the kiln, including the toast when the fire was lit, and the informal giving of gifts at the end of the firing. As the kiln was being unloaded, on the morning of July 6th, Bill Hunt came out of his small trailer (where he had been staying during the firing, having driven in from Ohio to participate) holding a number of small cups he had made prior to the firing. He set them out on a table, and then proceeded to give a cup to each potter involved in the firing. Many of the potters then offered him a small token of their own from the recent firing; a cup, a mug, a bowl, a small figure. In the midst of all this, Bill turned to me and indicated I ought to have one as well, and my own collection of cherished pots thereby expanded. Other exchanges among the potters present occurred as well, as they compared the results each had received from the kiln. A few months later, Dick Lehman approached me at the wood firing symposium I organized at Indiana



Figure 5.6 - Mug and cups from (left to right) Dick Lehman, Mark Goertzen, and Bill Hunt.

University, and handed me a small mug that he had made. He said it had come out of the wood firing I attended that summer, and explained, “You ought to have a piece that you helped to fire.” This piece has become a constant reminder of both the beautiful results of that summer’s firing, as well as the connections I was able to build around the kiln at that time. An additional piece from Mark Goertzen has also become a beloved part of the collection in this manner, given after my husband and I helped to fire his kiln in summer 2015 (Fig. 5.6), and many other wares both given and purchased adorn our home.

Another representation of the potters’ collaboration at a particular wood firing sometimes comes in the form of pieces that have fused together in the firing. Wood firing can be a somewhat volatile process, and sometimes pieces will tilt over or fall off of their stands during the firing, occasionally leaning into other pieces and then fusing while the natural wood ash glaze is hot and sticky. Once the kiln cools and the glaze has hardened, there is often no way to disconnect stuck pieces without



Figure 5.7 - Two pairs of fused, wood-fired vessels. July 2013.

causing irreparable damage to their surface or structure (Fig. 5.7), and they therefore cannot be used or sold. To further complicate matters, more often than not the two or three pieces that have stuck together will have each been made by different potters. Rather than discarding these accidental collaborations, the potters will often have a discussion amongst themselves to decide which of those who were involved in the accident will be allowed to keep the result (or, whether they are willing to attempt to break the pieces apart, if the point of adherence is small enough and could be sanded smooth afterwards). While these pieces may not be the most pleasing aesthetically, and can be an upsetting loss of work for the potters involved, they can also offer a point of comedic relief and a reminder that the wood firing process involves giving up a great deal of control, leaving works up to the caprice of the kiln. Displayed at the kiln or in the potter's home, the piece becomes a memento reflective of that working relationship, the collaborative firing of the kiln that brought together both the potters as friends and the combined pottery forms.

Visiting the kilns of many wood firing potters around the state of Indiana, I have observed that these kilns are usually surrounded by vessels that suffered various accidents in the firing (cracks, breaks, or the abovementioned conjoining of separate forms), and also, the kilns are often decorated with small clay figures, often adorning the top of the archway over the kiln door (such as the ceramic spoon over Bill Kremer's kiln, shown in the previous chapter). In many cases, these figures were constructed by potters on shift during the firing, using spare bits of clay or wadding (a highly refractory clay substance formed into balls and placed under pots to help keep them from sticking to the kiln shelves) found around the kiln. These decorative pieces might be made in relation to a conversation or joke made around the kiln, and they are rarely examples of the potter's best sculptural work. Quite often they are left unfired, the bone-dry clay becoming highly fragile and easily broken. Their ephemeral quality is appropriate for the setting, however, since the group coming together around the kiln is likewise ephemeral; it is rare for the exact same group of potters to fire together more than once, even though

certain friends may attend much more frequently than others. Left as mementos that will sit at the kiln site in perpetuity (likely until they are accidentally broken), these clay figures serve as reminders of the presence and assistance of collaborators at the firing – people without whom the wood firing would not be possible, nor nearly as enjoyable.

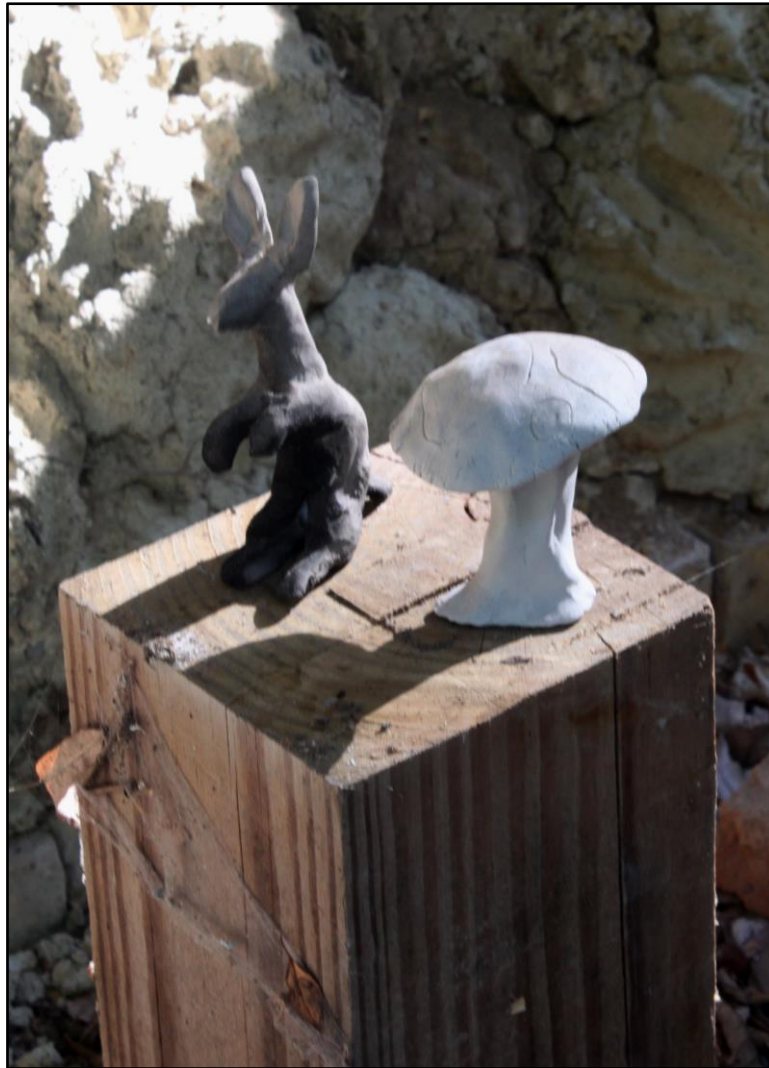


Figure 5.8 - Animal and mushroom figures near Mark Goertzen's kiln. September 2014.

Collected Pots as Physical Resources and Representations of Artistic Lineage

Beyond the practice of giving and exchanging pottery as gifts, another place where we can examine the close interpersonal relationships between potters is in the collection of works that are representative of one's artistic family tree. Many pottery traditions around the world have been passed down through families, and many of these have been the subject of study for folklorists and art historians; well-known examples in the United States include families in Georgia and North Carolina, as well as extensive Native American traditions. Caroleen Sanders in North Carolina, for example, learned the art of pottery from her mother and others in her family, and still has a collection of her mother's work which she can reference in her own creative work (Mecham 2009, 130).⁹ Similarly, Wanda Aragon learned from her mother, Frances Torivio, and others in her family (Duffy 2011, 201). However, for Wanda, finding pots from others further back in her ancestry was a challenge; in her search for Acoma pots made by her ancestors, she began primarily with a collection of sketches and photographs acquired through museum research. However, these resources were not enough, and she was inspired "to keep searching for the old pots themselves, to see and touch them in order to appreciate their subtle qualities and true colors, consider them from all sides, and understand the structural systems of their designs," feats which were not possible with static, two-dimensional images (Duffy 2011, 203). This statement highlights the importance of having the physical pot in one's collection; aspects such as balance, texture, and weight are not experienced visually as well as they are tactilely.

⁹ There are a number of other brief references to collecting in *The Living Tradition: North Carolina Potters Speak*, but unfortunately this was not a topic on which the interviewers focused much attention. This includes: Jennie Bireline's mention of looking at other pots in her home while making (31), Charles Davis Brown's brief anecdote about a large vase which he made with one of his mentors many years ago (49), Vernon Owens' discussion of an old churn that is "just perfect" (97), and interview with Hal & Eleanor Pugh who have collected sherds left by a potter who previously worked on their property in the early 1800s (109).

While many potters do keep images and sketches as resources for creative inspiration, collecting actual pots is just as important – if not more so – because it gives the potter a deeper understanding of the form. David Stuempfle echoes this experience when he says, “I kept buying books to learn from, and going to museums and, at one point, I just had to buy some old pots to hold.” Tactile interaction with pots is, however, still only a small part of the experience for David: “‘the main connection I have to the tradition is the human one – and I got that through Vernon and Melvin and others in Seagrove,’ he says emphatically” (Hewitt and Sweezy 2005, 255). Although contemporary pottery traditions (such as those in North Carolina and Michiana) are not as often passed through families, teachers and students often speak of one another in terms of kinship and generational relationships. Feeling a close affinity to those who have been their teachers or mentors, students or apprentices, potters often desire to collect and display works from these important figures in their lives. There appears to be a great deal of variation between whether these pieces are acquired as gifts or through trade or purchase, but no matter how they are acquired, there is a strong commonality in the practice of collecting pieces which are representative of one’s artistic kinship. For example, when I have spoken with Dick Lehman, Marvin Bartel, and Bill Kremer – all potters who have dedicated much of their time to educating others – they have all pointed out works around their homes that have been made by students or apprentices. Having these pieces on display gives the teachers an opportunity to express pride in the accomplishments of their students, and less directly, to express pride in their own teaching skills; the success of the student (often related when verbally describing the creator of the artwork at hand) is reflective of the effectiveness of the teacher.

Collecting and displaying ceramic pieces reflective of one’s past – in this case, as a parent, child, teacher or student – both tells a visual narrative of education and kinship, and simultaneously gives the potter an opportunity to verbally relate those stories of the past which are most important to their identities as artists. If someone inquires about a piece on display in their home or studio, or adorning

their kiln, they have an opportunity to verbally express their feelings for that person, explain the story of how they received the piece, and to tell of other important aspects of that relationship. Thus, not only does the object itself reflect an intimate relationship, but also it is through that object that the potter has the opportunity to share personal details with someone who has been invited into the private or semi-private space where they work and/or live. All of these objects are situated somewhere between the categories Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has suggested. She defines souvenirs and mementos as objects that “from the outset intended to serve as a reminder of an ephemeral experience or absent person,” as I would argue most items in a potter’s collection do (1989, 331). However, collections of mugs, for example, could also fit under her rubric for “material companions,” as they are incorporated into daily life, used often, and valued for their continual presence in one’s life (330). Furthermore, in her discussion of miniatures and models, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes that “Such objects are a medium of exchange and focus of interaction - a talking point,” an observation which holds true for nearly all pots in a potter’s collection (335). When I have visited the Michiana potters, I have observed pottery on display throughout their homes; pots sit outside in gardens, yards, and on porches, and indoors throughout the house displayed in various fashions. Often large pots or sculptures sit on floors or tables, and smaller pieces are placed on counters and shelves, while functional wares might be found in cabinets or on countertops. Work that was made to be hung often adorns the walls, as well. While living rooms, sitting rooms, or dining rooms are popular locations for the largest or most significant conversation pieces, it is not uncommon for pottery to line the shelves in bedrooms as well. Marvin Bartel, for example, once took my husband and I on an extensive tour of his home, where every room holds objects that signify relationships with students, teachers, and other artists whom he has known.

This trend exists well beyond the Michiana potters, and is relatively well-documented by folklorists working with potters around the United States. For example, looking to the past, Kim Ellington speaks with fondness of potter in his own artistic lineage, Sam Propst, who “lived just down the road

when he was young” and who worked with Kim’s mentor, Burlon Craig. Kim, now a renowned potter in his own right, owns a large, broken, five gallon jug made by Propst, which Kim calls “my ghost pot, because it haunts me. It’ll keep coming back whenever I’m making something. I’ll think about how damned thin [walled] that Propst is... And there is not a single pot that I will make of five gallons that I don’t see that this thing doesn’t echo... My god, the man set a standard that is unequalled.” Kim’s biographer, Charles Zug, explains that this is typical in the North Carolina tradition: “For Kim and his contemporaries, all of whom collect these old utilitarian vessels when they can afford them, these ghosts from the past continue to instruct and inspire – and also serve as the basis for future work,” (Zug 1986, 38-39). Again, this approach to collecting echoes Pomian’s discussion of the varying purposes of collections, as he says that objects can act “as go-betweens between those who gaze upon them and the invisible from whence they came” (Pomian 1994, 171). While this can be a useful perspective in discussing deities or people from faraway lands, as Pomian does, objects function in similar ways to represent those who were once close and have now passed on or moved away. Potter’s collections are often clear representations of those social relationships which are – like the limited engagement of older generation with younger, or teacher with student – no longer present in their everyday lives.

Purchasing Work from Other Potters

In Daniel Miller’s ethnography of shopping, he provides an example of a mother who takes her children to a toy store as a way of rewarding them while on a shopping trip. Despite not entering the store with the intention to purchase a toy, she does decide to buy a small item at the end of the visit due to a feeling of obligation toward the shop, which she has used for entertainment purposes (Miller 2001, 20). This example clearly illustrates the idea that purchased items may not always be a part of our lives due to a particular affection for the form, function, or aesthetic value of the object, but instead may have come into our lives due to a particular social function. As I discussed in previous sections of

this chapter, it is common for a potter to own pieces which were received as gifts, or selected as representatives of close interpersonal relationships, and not all of these pieces necessarily fit that potter's personal aesthetic ideals. This holds true even in the case of works the potter purchases. Objects come into an individual's possession for complex reasons, and in analyzing a collection, we must keep in mind that any item in the collection is likely tied to complex social interactions and cultural values held by the collector.

As I demonstrated above, work is often acquired by a variety of means when a close interpersonal relationship exists between potters; gifts are given, and teachers and students often seek to collect work as representations of their relationship. A slightly less intimate example of collecting amongst potters involves the purchase of another potter's work, particularly under the circumstances when a close interpersonal relationship does not exist. There are many reasons for a potter to purchase another's work: generally a purchase offers financial support to other artists, and often it gives the potter an opportunity to own pieces that display strong workmanship or admired aesthetics. Often, the purchase of a piece can represent the potter's admiration for the work of a well-known artist; in some cases, the large financial commitment necessary to purchase expensive pots can represent proof of the potter's seriousness in their respect for the other artist, as well as the necessity of having an object at hand as a physical declaration to others of that significant feeling. However, the idea that a potter will only purchase and own a piece that represents their exact aesthetic ideals is much too simplistic; many other factors are at play. In the pursuit of his or her personal collection, each potter will usually reflect upon concerns relating to financial priorities, space available for storage and display of collected work, and even the social ramifications (whether positive or negative) of being associated with other artists' work.

The annual National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts (NCECA) Cup Sale is a useful situation within which to analyze these complex purchasing choices. The Cup Sale takes place each year during the NCECA annual conference; it is a one-day sale consisting of donated works brought in by potters with a range of experience in ceramics, and the sale of the donated cups raises funds to support scholarships, residencies, and other opportunities provided by the NCECA organization for its members. The result of this format – where both beginner and experienced, relatively unknown and very famous potters donate – is that it has become a place where potters enthusiastically acquire works made by others, often arriving in the early hours of the morning in order to be one of the first in line when the doors open, and therefore able to purchase works made by popular artists before they are sold. Already the idea of a purchased piece offering direct financial support to another artist is clearly oversimplified, since the proceeds of this sale go to an organization rather than to an individual. Additionally, since the potters are purchasing within this specific context, the form of the pot has already been determined; whether or not a cup form is of particular interest to the potter, if one chooses to purchase from this sale it is the only form one will be able to acquire.¹⁰

At the 2014 NCECA conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, I had an opportunity to talk with Troy Bungart and Moey Hart, two Michiana potters who have dubbed themselves the “Troy and Moe Show” (Fig. 5.9). Although neither is a full-time professional potter, both are quite enthusiastic about ceramics and particularly wood firing, and their enthusiasm and willingness to participate in nearly any wood firing that is happening in their area adds great energy and helps to maintain the Michiana tradition of wood firing. At this particular conference, Troy and Moey explained that they were planning

¹⁰ It is important to note, however, that the artists’ interpretation of the cup form vary greatly; anything from tiny teacups to mugs to large, handle-less tumblers may be found in the sale. Even some “cups” with tremendous sculptural aspects that render them nearly useless to drink from are included on a fairly regular basis.



Figure 5.9 - Michiana Potters Troy Bungart (left) and Moey Hart (right) pose for a photo while firing Mark Goertzen's kiln. September 2014.

to arrive at the Cup Sale in the early hours of the morning, well before the doors would open, in order to get prime spots in line and therefore have an opportunity to purchase cups donated by the potters whom they admire most. This was, for them, a rare occasion where small pieces by well-known potters around the country would be available for purchase, and it was therefore an opportunity to own a cup or mug which they might otherwise not be able to easily acquire. Soon after the Cup Sale, on March 23rd of 2014, Moey posted several images on Facebook, each one featuring a new mug that he had purchased, along with the comment, "Some of my finds from NCECA this year. I'm so proud to own these! Can't wait till next year!" In another post on the same day, he also boasted that he had arrived so early that he was the fourth person in line for the sale that morning.

These cup forms, and more specifically mugs, have recently taken on further significance amongst potters who participate in online dialogues about pottery on Facebook, Instagram, and similar

networking sites. Within the past few years, potters have begun to participate in a custom of photographing a mug (either by itself, or in the form of a “selfie” of themselves holding the mug), and posting the image on a Monday with a message that denotes the post as part of the “Mug Shot Monday” trend. The hashtag used for participation in this trend is generally written as #mugshotmonday.¹¹ The images can take many forms, but more often than not in my observations the mug shown in the image has been made by another potter.¹² Furthermore, Facebook gives users the ability to “tag” other users in images; these tags are attached a specific area of the image (often someone’s face, though in this case the tag would be attached to the mug) and then the user can add text in the form of the other user’s name, which links to the person’s profile page. This means that whenever a mug is posted it can be linked to the Facebook page of both its maker and its owner. This online display of one’s collection is a prime illustration of the function of a contemporary collection in developing and maintaining social relationships. In this case, ceramic works are reconstituted as new objects when they are used in images, and the circulation of those images leads to social interactions in the online format; once posted on Facebook or similar sites, images can be “liked,” commented on, and re-shared, and each instance of interaction is generally visible to both users’ online group of friends or followers.

While this kind of activity might be common amongst those who are also “real-world” friends who also connect outside of the online community, it also provides potters with an ideal situation in which they can reach out to others with whom they might not yet have a close interpersonal relationship, and demonstrate their interest in the other potter via the display of pots owned. This was

¹¹ For those not familiar with the term, a “hashtag,” (which is created by using “#” followed by a word or set of words, i.e. #mugshotmonday) is a marker of topical interest which, when clicked, links a user to other posts recently marked with the same topic within that particular social networking website, i.e. Facebook or Twitter.

¹² Another common trend is to promote one’s own work, often by posting recently completed mugs that one has made, or by posting an image that shows mugs in the process of being made.

indeed the case with Troy and Moey, as I observed after their purchases during the 2014 NCECA Cup Sale. Specifically, one of the seven mugs Moey had purchased was made by Ted Neal, who is currently a professor at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana, and who is well known among potters for his kiln building skills and his industrialized style of wood fired ceramic forms. Soon after the 2014 NCECA conference concluded, Moey and Ted became Facebook friends. About a month later, Moey posted a new image of Ted's mug, appropriately tagged with the name "Ted Neal," and he furthermore mentioned in the text that he often uses the mug (Fig. 5.10). Ted commented on the image, saying, "Thanks for the props. Enjoy!" Over the summer months, I noticed that Ted, Moey, and Troy all began interacting more and more in the Facebook format, liking and commenting on one another's posts.



Figure 5.10 - Image of Moey Hart holding his recently purchased mug made by Ted Neal. Photo courtesy of Moey Hart. May 1, 2014.

Finally, these interactions culminated with Troy and Moey visiting the Ball State University ceramics facility in late August of 2014 to participate in a firing of the train kiln (a type of wood-fired kiln) which Ted had built. It is quite likely that this firing collaboration would not have happened without the development of their Facebook friendship and interactions over the previous months, which seems to have served as proof of Troy and Moey's dedication to wood firing (photos of the two of them firing at least 3 different wood kilns, owned by friends in the Michiana area and beyond, were posted during the summer); these were a visible and easily accessible reminder to other potters of their serious interest in the technique, as well as their likely reliability when participating in wood firings. The Ball State firing event was well-documented on Facebook, including a post by Troy, captioned "Loading the Ball State train kiln with Ted Neal, Tim Compton and Moe," and followed the next day with a post by Ted



Figure 5.11 - Todd Pletcher (left) and Ted Neal (right) work together building Todd's wood fired train kiln. August 2015.

saying, “A nice candle, and it's not even my birthday.”¹³ Thanks for all the help #troyandmoeshow.” Thus, at the conclusion of a successful firing, their newfound friendship was ostensibly solidified. Furthermore, a year later, Michiana potter Todd Pletcher hired Ted Neal to come to his property to lead the building of his new train kiln, the most recent addition to the wood fired kilns in the Michiana area (Fig. 5.11). Indeed, during the building of this kiln in August of 2015, Ted confirmed to me that his initial introduction to the Michiana group was primarily through his online contact with Troy and Moey. Although Ted’s home base is Muncie, Indiana – around a two hour drive from Goshen, and certainly not part of Michiana – he is close enough that Troy, Moey, and later Todd and his wife Anna were all able to visit Muncie and help to fire his kiln, therefore building relationships that would have been much more challenging to develop in-person if they lived at a greater distance.

Collecting for Public Display

Discussions of collecting thus far in this chapter have generally entailed personal collections that are displayed in a manner that could be called private or semi-private; works kept at home or at a potter’s studio function on the level of interpersonal relationships, and are not often brought to the attention of a broader audience. Even items shared in an online format often have a limited circulation amongst those designated as “friends” or “followers,” depending upon the kind of website one is visiting and the privacy settings utilized by the users. However, a potter’s collection is not necessarily limited to this realm. Potter’s studios, for example, take a wide variety of forms: some individuals’ studios are quite private and their products are sold elsewhere, while some potters invite customers into their studios and have a showroom for sales, and still others are very social, collaborative spaces where many

¹³ The “candle” is a colloquialism referring to the flame coming out of the kiln’s chimney, which at certain points can signal that the firing is going well.

potter's work and sometimes sell together. In some cases, therefore, a potter's collection kept at the studio is apt to be more public than other types of personal collections. The idea of analyzing the collection found in an artist's studio is not a new one in the study of art. For example, Sarah Burns pulls together the perspectives of many writers during the late 19th century, and she notes that one way critics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were responding to the work of fine artists was to consider not just their art work, but also their personalities and particularly their studios; perception of the artist was inextricably tied to perceptions of his or her artwork. Many critics that Burns cites were concerned with ways the artist's personality was reflected in their working spaces, which had the effect of putting artists in a position of needing to cultivate "artistic" and interesting spaces in which to sell their works (1996, 55-59).

A non-consumer situation also worthy of consideration is that of the college or university setting, where artworks collected and displayed by the professors are used as teaching tools and seen by the eyes of many students over the years. While a potter's collection might often be considered rather private and meant for personal use, a teacher's collection brought into the classroom is certainly intended for a broader audience. Examples of this abound; in Indiana alone, I have encountered such collections at Goshen College, Ball State University, Earlham College, and Indiana University, among others. At Ball State, for example, Ted Neal and Vance Bell have made a point of collecting works from former students, previous visiting artists, and well-known figures in the world of ceramics; these pieces sit on the shelves of the studio as visual references for students (see Fig. 5.12 and 5.13 for examples). This is not a unique approach in teaching ceramics, as is also evidenced by the study collection that Karl Martz helped to create for students at Indiana University. Martz, who had studied briefly with Bernard Leach, Shoji Hamada, and Soetsu Yanagi at Black Mountain College in North Carolina, was no stranger to the intense Japanese influence on American pottery at the time (McKimmie 2009, 68). It follows that the Indiana University Art Museum collection now includes works by Japanese potters which were acquired



Figure 5.12 – Part of Ted Neal's mug collection on display at Ball State University, posted on Facebook with the hashtag #mugshotmonday. Original caption reads, "Includes works by Daniel Anderson, David Eichelberger, Matt Repsher, Deborah Schwartzkopf, Chris Gustin, Troy Bungart, Mel Griffin, Ben Bates, David Peters, Dick Lehman, Markus Urbanik, Linda Christianson, John Neely, Kyla Toomey, Michael Kline, Jennifer Allen, Matt Long, Adam Knoche, Collette Spears, Adam Phillip Knoche, Lorna Meaden, Diner Mug, David Bolton, Doug Peltzman, Chris Pickett, Brandon Whitacre and Daniel Ricardo Teran." Photo courtesy of Ted Neal.



Figure 5.13 - More of Ted Neal's mug collection, also posted with the hashtag #mugshotmonday. Original caption reads, " Includes works by S Harris, Michael Corney, Kris Nelson, Chika Oumi, Mathew Metz, Jack Troy, Brian Taylor, Ron Meyers, Lindsay Oesterritter, Jane Shellenbarger, Gabrielle Graber, Seth Green, Susan Harris, Brenda C. Lichman, Justin Lambert, Birdie Boone, Warren Mackenzie, Tara Wilson, Susan Aruda, John Neely, Daniel Anderson, Sunshine Cobb, Simon Levin, Shawn S Spangler, Rick Dunn, Jeff Kleckner, Peter Beasecker, Charity Davis-Woodard, Jeff Oestreich, Tony Nankervis, Charity Davis-Woodard, W. Mac, Elisa Helland-Hansen, Ben Bates, Robert Archambeau, C Davis, Brad Schweiger, R Meyers, Steven Lee, Ben Krupka and Ron Kovatch." Photo courtesy of Ted Neal.

by Martz while he travelled in Japan in the early 1960s – pieces which were obtained specifically to enhance collection available to art students at the university. The potters whose work Karl helped to bring into the museum include Tsuji Seimei and Toyo Kaneshige, who are known internationally; Martz's presence likely had other impacts on the collection, as well. In this case, the pots acquired by the potter have moved further into the public realm; while they are not currently exhibited, some have been in the

past, and as part of the collection, they are always available for students, scholars, and others to view upon request.

Although Karl Martz passed away in 1997, his legacy as a teacher lives on, in part due to his actions as a collector and his contributions to the museum. This brings us back to a consideration of Dick Lehman's concerns about the fate of a potter's collection, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter: what does (or should) happen to a potter's private collection once he is no longer around to benefit from it? As a set of items brought together to meet his or her idiosyncratic creative and social needs, it seems the potter's collection is potentially rendered obsolete after his death. Indeed, the creative inspirations for which they were meant and the narratives evoked by those objects would, if not recorded, pass on along with the potter. However, that does not mean that these objects necessarily cease to be useful when they are no longer in the hands of their initial owner. Dick Lehman, for example, decided to be proactive about selling some of his collection, a significant portion of which was purchased by Bob and Ellie Haan for inclusion in their collection of Indiana ceramics.

The Haans have been long-time collectors of Indiana art; they have amassed a substantial collection of paintings by T.C. Steele and others from the Hoosier Group, as well as a number of other 19th and 20th century Indiana painters. More recently, they have begun to collect examples of contemporary pottery made by Indiana residents, which complements their collection of historical Indiana pottery made by the Overbeck Sisters, former Rookwood Pottery designer Laura Fry,¹⁴ as well as the abovementioned Karl Martz, who in addition to teaching at Indiana University also worked as a potter in Brown County, Indiana for many years. All of these artworks are currently housed in the Haan

¹⁴ While Rookwood does not have a direct Indiana connection, its location in Cincinnati, Ohio situates it firmly in the American Midwest. Furthermore, Fry lived a substantial portion of her later life in Lafayette, Indiana, where she taught at Purdue University (Purdue University Libraries, Archives and Special Collections 2012).



Figure 5.14 - The exterior of the Hann Mansion Museum in Lafayette, Indiana. October 2014.

Mansion Museum in Lafayette, Indiana (Fig. 5.14).¹⁵ This museum was also the location of the Indiana Ceramics Celebration held on October 24th through 26th, and November 1st and 2nd in 2014. During the Celebration tour hours on October 25th, I was able to speak with Bob and Ellie about their collecting goals and the process by which they had acquired this substantial collection.

In discussing their quest for Indiana pottery, Ellie Haan stated that she and her husband started the collection by meeting and purchasing from just one or two potters; they then followed the suggestions of those potters in their pursuit of others, onward and outward until they had met (and

¹⁵ The Haan Mansion Museum is a complex establishment. To give a brief overview, this substantial structure began its life as the Connecticut State Building in the 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis, Missouri. After the fair, it was moved to Lafayette, Indiana by owners who made minor alterations to the original design and turned it into a private home. The mansion is now owned and lived in by Bob and Ellie Haan, who have made arrangements for it to be endowed as a public museum after they are no longer able to sufficiently care for it themselves.

purchased from) a network of over two dozen significant Indiana ceramic artists. Their focus was on teachers and those who had settled down to work in Indiana for significant periods of time; rather than brief visitors, they wanted to collect those who had become part of the fabric of Indiana life, and who had therefore had a strong impact on the visual presence and future direction of ceramics in Indiana. This might mean the exclusion of students who were only in Indiana to study, or even very productive potters who did not teach, but to the Haans, the significance lies in the tracing of tradition – a genealogy of Indiana potters, one might say.¹⁶ Just like the potter-collectors discussed in the above sections of this paper, the Haans have brought their own aesthetic preferences, cultural values, and historical



Figure 5.15 - Part of the Haan's exhibit of Dick Lehman's pottery, displayed on a piece of period furniture in their museum. October 2014.

¹⁶ A similar effort has been made by Vernon & Pam Owens, who established a small museum on the property of their pottery studio, called Jugtown, in North Carolina. As Vernon says, “to have a representation of what Jugtown means for people to come and see – it’s very, very important. I mean, you get so much more of a picture [of the history],” (Frances and Zug, 96).

perceptions into the development of their collection and museum. As Marvin Bartel commented at the 2014 Michiana Pottery Tour (soon after the Haans purchased dozens of pieces from his home), their tastes run to the traditional instead of the modern. A glass-topped table that Marvin had made, for instance, was too “contemporary” or “modern” for their taste, and the Haans passed it up in favor of a piece that would fit in better with the style of their early 20th century mansion and the period furniture and artwork it already contained. In her consideration of the development of museums in late Renaissance culture, Paula Findlen says, “As a repository of past activities, created in the mirror of the present, the museum was above all a dialectical structure which served as a meeting point in which the historical claims of the present were invoked in the memory of the past” (2004, 161). Furthermore, the museum was “a conceptual system through which collectors interpreted and explored the world they inhabited” (162). These observations are no less true of many museums today, and they are clearly reflected in the collecting practices of the Haans.

The Haan collection also includes a few pieces made by highly revered potters such as Shoji Hamada. The apparent strangeness of the inclusion of Japanese ceramics in a museum dedicated to Indiana artists is first reconciled by the acknowledgement that contemporary American potters have been, in many cases, deeply influenced by the influx of Japanese ceramics into the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Furthermore, these Japanese pieces were part of Dick Lehman’s “study collection” – pieces he had gathered as inspirations for his own work and as symbolic gestures of respect (via ownership) for these potter’s work – which the Haans had acquired along with much of Dick’s own work. It is, moreover, important to recognize the context in which these pieces were displayed; unlike many other ceramic pieces which were displayed on open shelves and various items of furniture around the house, these small Japanese pieces were included in a rather poorly lit cabinet with

other small works by Indiana potters such as Dick Lehman and his former apprentice Todd Pletcher. The Japanese pieces were not clearly labeled as non-Indiana works, and unless one were to look closely and read the small pieces of paper sometimes placed inside or nearby, one might not know at first glance that these pots were made by venerated Japanese potters, and once owned by an Indiana potter who has spent a great deal of time in Japan. However, when I inquired, Ellie was quite happy to guide me to this display and explain the history of the pots. As her husband Bob explained during the event, since so much of the collection was acquired in the months just prior to the exhibition, creating labels for all of the pieces was a daunting task for one person (himself) to undertake alone. Most likely, future exhibits will include more thorough labeling.

Objects and Social Interactions

“One of the impressive things about these 19th-century pots is how they’ve come to mean different things to different generations,” says David Stuempfle, in reference to the many old North Carolina pots displayed alongside his own in “The Potters Eye” exhibit in 2005. “From utilitarian objects to family heirlooms to cultural treasures – these pots have stood the test of time,” (Hewitt and Sweezy, 255). Yet it is not just time that leads to this stratification of significance. Within just one potter’s contemporary collection, viewers will find pieces that have just such a variety of meanings; Dick Lehman’s collection is smaller now than it once was, but it still encompasses many categories of objects, including pieces of his own that he utilizes every day, pieces from students and mentors who are nearly as close as kin, and pieces from his connections in Japan. Every object in his collection – and in the collections of many other potters – has a multiplicity of meanings and functions in his life. Indeed, in one way or another, we all create meaning in our lives, and more often than is generally acknowledged, we do so through interaction with objects. This is material culture, “the vast universe of objects used by humankind to cope with the physical world, to facilitate social intercourse, and to benefit our state of

mind... that sector of our physical environment that we modify through culturally determined behavior,” (Deetz, 35). It would be a gross oversimplification to say that potters collect pots only for one reason or another. Instead, (to echo the words of Dick Lehman) they surround themselves with beautiful and meaningful pots, in the hopes that it might make them better potters. Developing as a potter involves much more than attempting to mimic ideal pots of those who have gone before; those who are successful collect ideas that they like and remix elements to create a style of their own. And aesthetics are only part of the picture, since social relationships are also key to the professional development of a potter; strong relationships with teachers and mentors, friendships with those who help to fire one’s kiln, pride in one’s students, and careful navigation of new social and professional relationships with other potters are crucial as well.

Looking at the way that these social interactions are reflected in and reimagined by the possession of objects can shed light not only on the life of the individual potter, but the broader social structure she or he lives in, as well. People often root ephemeral, cerebral moments in the physical world through an association with more permanent objects, attaching stories and deep personal feelings to a lasting, physical item which can be seen, felt, and sensed in so many ways that a memory cannot. In the most intimate sense, in the interactions between individuals and objects they behold, emotions are reflected and memories are brought into physical form; we express our sense of self through objects, and in doing so, our physical relationship with the world intertwines with the invisible network of human, social relationships that sustain us.

Chapter 6

The Potter's Life

As we study art, we may also study the culture and values of the person who created that artwork. With wood fired pottery as an entry point into the culture of clay in the Michiana region, we can learn so much about the potters who live and work there today. When they speak of their values, in life and in their work with clay, so many say “it’s about community.” There is no value in work without the support of others, and no satisfaction without that work being of value to others. Clay is more than a profession for those who are production potters in Michiana today; pottery represents a passion for a creative and productive life, and a deep connection to the people who share that passion.

The research and analyses I have described I have in the preceding chapters have almost exclusively attended to the kind of relationship found between those who share a vocation. This text was intended to focus on the professional potters in Michiana and those to whom I referred initially as “pottery adjacent full-time,” particularly professors and teachers of art, as well as suppliers like Troy Bungart and Moey Hart who, in addition to the tools and materials they make available to the group, are also heavily invested in making pottery. Sometimes, a similar relationship is also present with those who are particularly invested in pottery as a hobby, to the point that it might be more accurately described as a secondary career (this applies to guild members, for example, who devote incredible time and energy to the craft). What they all have in common is the fact that pottery is central to their identity, takes a substantial percentage of their time and energy, and is a main financial consideration in their lives. However, we must not neglect the many other kinds of supportive relationships which are also present in the potters lives, including family and non-potter friends, consumers (both individual and

institutional), suppliers, and a variety of connections with the broader world of American ceramics. Both Glassie's model for the study of material culture and Becker's suggestions for the study of art worlds demands this, and while many of these connections have been alluded to in the preceding pages, it is worthwhile to elucidate this aspect of the pottery profession in more detail.

Beyond the Local Occupational Group

Beginning close to home, family and friends are often a crucial aspect of the potter's success. In addition to their partnership in many aspects of everyday life and the crucial emotional support that a spouse or partner usually provides, many spouses and partners are also quite directly involved in the potter's work. A number of instances of this have already been included in this text, but other examples from my fieldwork abound: I remember Jo Lehman bringing food to the first unloading of Mark Goertzen's kiln that I attended; Todd's partner Anna working alongside him to build their new wood kiln; Mark and his wife Suzanne taking late night shifts stoking the wood kiln together; Justin's wife Brooke participating in numerous exhibitions with him, selling her paintings. At the 2015 fall firing of Bill Kremer's kiln, one of the potter's girlfriends confided in me that there is an ongoing conversation among the potter's spouses and partners about the fact that their role is often to reassure the potter as to the quality of their work; having not made the pots, the partners find they are sometimes less critical of the results, and do not see the same little imperfections that the potter might pick out. This particular woman said she will often encourage her boyfriend to keep a piece and live with it for awhile, because after a couple of weeks, he often comes to love the results as much as she does.

Parents and children play important supportive roles as well, in many cases. Numerous family members are always present at the Michiana Pottery Tours, often helping with sales or refreshments. I have also met Justin's father and Todd and Anna's parents at a firing of Justin's kiln and the building of Todd's kilns, respectively, and their enthusiasm for their children's work is abundantly clear (Fig. 6.1).



Figure 6.1 - Todd and Anna's parents help to prepare bricks for the kiln build.

Additionally, those potters who have children often involve their children in their work, to some degree. One of Troy Bungart's teenage daughters often assists him with the brush workshops he runs, and has attended kiln firings and pottery tours with him often, as well, sometimes tending to sales at his booth. Both Justin and Moey's elementary-school age (and younger) children have been present around the studio and at kiln firings. And, Justin's eldest son Layton – no more than six or seven years old at the time – set up a booth of his own selling just-sprouted maple trees that he had dug himself and planted in some of his fathers' seconds (Fig 6.2).¹ Adult children are sometimes involved in the potter's work, as

¹ "Seconds" referring to pots that Justin likely would not otherwise put up for sale.

well. For example, Dick's son Scott participated as an artist in the 2015 pottery tour. Although Scott is an adult with a music career of his own, he also makes pottery on occasion, and he and a friend (who does macramé) coordinated to make and sell hanging planters at the Tour. Merrill Krabill's son just finished a ceramics degree of his own, and intends to pursue a career in art education. Even grandchildren can play an important role, for those who have them: Marvin keeps a piece in his studio which was made by his granddaughter when she was only six years old, and he often points it out proudly to visitors.

Family is not only involved in the work of being a potter; they are a part of a potter's everyday life, and thus take part in the collections of pottery that I described in chapter five. Justin has written an article which beautifully describes the influence this collection has on his family life:

Sometimes my three-year-old son, Layton, helps me put away the clean dishes. Often he'll pick up a cup and ask, "Daddy, did you make this one?" Usually, the answer is, "no," and then the question is, "who made it?" And he'll pose this question to every dish before it goes back on the shelf. And what I think is great about this, are the answers... Virtually all the pieces have a name that goes with them, as nearly everything in our cupboard is handmade by someone we've met, or know. (2012, 28)

Justin goes on to recount his own first experience of a potter's studio, when his parents commissioned a set of dinnerware, and the lasting influence it had on him (including some later connections he made with the work of the same potter). He ends the article with remarks that speak to the role family can play in developing an appreciation for art:

While I don't expect Layton to become a potter, I do hope to pass along the same sense of respect for handmade objects that my parents helped to root in me. It feels good to share moments of connection to others in our lives while unloading the dishwasher with my son. I think one of the strengths of the studio pottery movement, and the benefits of buying handmade objects, is this experience. There's a face and a name, and a culture and experience, behind each piece, not just dirt and glaze. (29)

While documenting family involvement was not my priority during my fieldwork, it is unmistakably a crucial part of life for the Michiana potters, and one I could not do justice to with just a few remarks here. Yet the examples above speak clearly about the significance of family connections in the lives of these potters.



Figure 6.2 - Justin Rothshank's son Layton (right) with a customer at the 2014 Michiana Pottery Tour. September 2014.



Figure 6.3 - Mark's neighbors help to split wood for the firing using a hydraulic wood splitter. June 2013.

Friendships are often just as crucial as family, and while the connections between potters in this occupational group might often be best described as friendships, this does not preclude the existence of many other important friendships; those friends who live nearby are often quite present in the potter's lives. Friends and neighbors often come to help with wood firing, and are happy to help chop wood, stoke the fire, provide enlivening conversation around the kiln, and share enthusiasm for the results of

the firing; something which I have observed at nearly every firing and kiln unloading that I have attended (Fig. 6.3). Many share in hobbies like fishing and sailing, or are skilled craftsmen or women who can help to build a new house or kiln shed; Justin's home, for example, was built by the hands of many friends in the community. Often friendships have formed over shared goals in the community, with all wanting to make Goshen and Michiana a better place for residents; Cindy Cooper and Faye Pottinger's friendship, mentioned in chapter two, comes to mind in this regard. And quite often, the potters' good friends may be active in the arts or education, may own or work in a small local business, and therefore they share similar concerns and triumphs in their lives.

Another important social connection, which is sometimes (but not always) less intimate than friendship, is that of the potter and their clients. In chapter five, I addressed the collection of pottery primarily from the potter's point of view, but it is critical to acknowledge that in order to make this a profession and a sustainable source of income, a potter must build a clientele and maintain good relationships with those who routinely purchase and collect his or her work. While all of the professional potters engage in online sales to a certain degree, and many of them sell their work through wholesale or consignment arrangements at other galleries, face-to-face interactions at their studios and/or special sales events like the Michiana Pottery Tour are still quite crucial. Often, these situations give the potters an opportunity to learn quite a bit about how their work is received by others; by observing how a potential customer interacts with a pot, they are able to glean information about whether that pot feels comfortable to hold, has a pleasing texture, has good balance, and so on. Dick Lehman has published an article which describes this kind of interaction quite clearly:

Several weeks ago a woman came into my studio. She spent the longest time just looking among the mugs: handling, fondling, carrying several around the studio while hugging them. She checked the handles for how they fit her hand. The rims she put to her mouth to see how they felt. Several times she declined my offers of assistance, saying she was "doing just fine." After

nearly half an hour she called me to wrap up her choice. She had a satisfied smile across her face, a pleased-with-herself stance... “You see, I had one of your mugs for several years. I always started my day with coffee in your mug. But recently I broke it. And, you know, life has not been the same since. I don't mean to be melodramatic, but life for me was better when I started the day drinking out of that mug.” ...For several hours I mused at just how theatrical this customer had been - making a big deal over so little. But then it struck me. I had almost missed the wonderful gift of this curious exchange. Melodramatic or not, was not her response just exactly what I hope for in the making of my pots? Isn't it my fondest wish that the work of my hands will actually change someone's life, that the investment I make in clay will make someone's life just a little better? Of course it is! (Lehman 1993)

Creating work that will elicit such a strong response in a client is the ideal for many potters. And, seeing customers react to pots can be a substantial part of the potter's ongoing development.

Tom Unzicker also spoke with me about how client's preferences had played a role in the development of his style, describing how he and his brother had almost unconsciously shifted their work toward what customers prefer. As Becker says, artists almost always “take the imagined responses of others, learned through their experience in an art world, into account when they complete a work” (Becker [1982] 2008, 202). Tom explained that his own work in graduate school was “knarly... probably more like the traditional Japanese, with the crusty and rough surfaces. But, over the years, whether it's conscious or unconscious, [Jeff and I have] just found our customers respond better to shinier, smoother, glossier kind of surfaces, and brighter colors.” And, while it “isn't necessarily what our original vision was,” Tom still feels that “it's all worked out somehow. We still enjoy what we're doing. It's interesting, we've probably discovered some things in terms of surfaces and that kind of thing that we wouldn't have otherwise figured out.” In that way, clients can be a driving force in a potter's creativity, whether it is a direction the potter personally foresaw or not.



Figure 6.4 - Left to right: Steve Hansen, Eric Botbyl, Todd Pletcher, and Troy Bungart. All four fired Todd's kiln together, and then exhibited work at Todd's location on the Michiana Pottery Tour. September 2015.

Further regarding the context of consumption, most potters must also maintain relationships with the gallery owners who sell their work. While the Michiana potters all take part in a wide variety of exhibition opportunities – often including juried and invitational exhibits, wholesale or consignment arrangements, temporary individual and group exhibitions, and so forth – there are two galleries in particular that many of the potters exhibit with on a regular basis. These are the Schaller Gallery in St. Joseph, Michigan, and the Companion Gallery in Humboldt, Tennessee. Both galleries focus heavily on functional pottery, which is a good fit for most of the Michiana potters. Eric Botbyl, the owner of Companion Gallery, is also a potter and has a vested interest in wood firing; he is friends with many of

the Michiana potters, and has come to the area to fire with both Justin and Todd. He has also collaborated on some pieces with Justin, and exhibited some of his own work at Todd's studio during the 2015 Michiana Pottery Tour (Fig. 6.4). Although he lives at a substantial distance from Michiana, he could certainly be included as a more distant node in the network of Michiana pottery professionals. It is clear that the relationship he has with the Michiana potters is mutually beneficial, since he provides them with an opportunity to present their work to a broader audience, and they have provided him with opportunities to collaborate in making pottery.

Of course, we must not neglect those who provide the materials that are needed for the potters to do their work; they would have nothing to sell if they could not procure the necessary supplies. I have already mentioned Troy Bungart, who makes and sells pottery tools and brushes, and Moey Hart, who



Figure 6.5 - The sign at the entrance to Northern Indiana Pottery Supply, at the 2015 Michiana Pottery Tour.

opened Northern Indiana Pottery Supply in recent years to serve the pottery community in Michiana. Looking further outside of the Michiana region, however, there are a couple of suppliers which have been mentioned numerous times as I have spoken with these potters over the years. First, many use clays from Standard Ceramic Supply Company, out of Pennsylvania; Moey is now able to provide a central distribution location for those popular clays. Second – and perhaps more important – is the AMACO company (American Art Clay Company, Inc., which also makes Brent pottery wheels and other products), located in Indianapolis, Indiana. The company provides a wide range of clays, glazes, and other pottery supplies to the region's ceramic artists, and a number of the Michiana potters have had beneficial relationships with the company. For example, Todd Pletcher layers some of the AMACO Potter's Choice glazes on his production line, and is featured in a video on their website explaining how he gets some of these effects.² Justin Rothshank also tested some of AMACO's Low Fire Matt glazes, and his cups are now featured on their website.³ AMACO has also sometimes provided glazes for workshops held by the Michiana potters, particularly for youth classes. Often, relationships like these are mutually beneficial because the potter and the company will promote one another's work; for example, in situations such as those mentioned above, Todd, Justin, and AMACO have posted on social media sites about the work being done, which puts each in front of a wider online audience.⁴

² The YouTube video, also found at <https://youtu.be/hhDQJ9WNUDs>, is linked on the Amaco website: American Art Clay Co, Inc., "(PC) Potter's Choice Glazes," *Amaco.com*, accessed February 13, 2016, <http://www.amaco.com/t/glazes-and-underglazes/high-fire/potters-choice>.

³ The cups are used to demonstrate the entire line of colors that are available on the Amaco website: American Art Clay Co, Inc., "(LM) Low Fire Matt," *Amaco.com*, accessed February 13, 2016, <http://www.amaco.com/t/glazes-and-underglazes/low-fire/low-fire-matt>.

⁴ This kind of mutually beneficial relationship is not exclusive to Michiana. In fact, many ceramic suppliers ask artists to test and use their glazes, and then feature the artist in some way in their promotional materials.

I have also, throughout this text, hinted at many connections that these potters have to the broader contemporary ceramics world. Each of the potters has numerous relationships with other potters around the country and even around the world. These relationships take many forms: close personal friendships and ongoing correspondence, workshops taught or attended, travelling to fire kilns together, former teachers or students, chance meetings at annual NCECA meetings, and so on. Justin Rothshank, for example, has been a tremendous resource and can always point me to new artists with a connection to Goshen and Michiana, even if they are now living out of state. He also hosted a number of young artists at his location on the Michiana Pottery Tour in 2015. Stephanie Galli was included, and



Figure 6.6 - Stephanie Galli with her display of mugs at the 2015 Michiana Pottery Tour.

though she is originally from Detroit and has not lived in Michiana, Stephanie is one of many artists to make a connection through this broader network of potters. When I talked with her during the 2015 Michiana Pottery Tour, she recounted to me the serendipitous way in which she had connected with the potters in Michiana. In 2011, she had been travelling in China, and on her return flight, she met a woman who was returning to Indiana from Korea. As they talked, she discovered that this woman, Hannah, was dating a man whose father was a potter; in other words, Hannah's boyfriend (and now husband) is Scott Lehman, and his father is Dick Lehman. Stephanie recounted that when she recognized Dick's name, Hannah was not surprised, since many ceramic artists are familiar with Dick's work. However, Stephanie had attended Central Michigan University, where she studied ceramics with Greg Stahly, who had previously worked for Dick Lehman at the Old Bag Factory. Greg and Dick have remained close over the years, and Stephanie said she was quite surprised to make such an unlikely connection on the flight home. She, Hannah, and Scott have become good friends, and Stephanie began to know some of the broader network of Michiana potters through their friendship, eventually exhibiting her work there during the 2015 Michiana Pottery Tour. She finished her MFA at Indiana University in 2016, and is now happy to be returning to Central Michigan as a lecturer in ceramics. While Mount Pleasant, Michigan is too far north to be considered part of Michiana, it is close enough that Stephanie will likely maintain a close connection with the Michiana potters.

Other connections are made more directly, through visits to the Michiana area for professional reasons. Dick Lehman, for example recounts his friendship with famous ceramist Paul Soldner, who had lived in the Michiana area himself for a short time and whose father was a Mennonite minister. Once, when Paul had been commissioned to installing a hot tub at a resort in Lakeside, MI, he found that those who were supposed to be helping with the project were drinking a lot and not doing much work. So,

Paul suggested asking Dick Lehman to help, saying “He probably has the Mennonite work ethic.” Thus the two of them, along with Randy Schmidt (a professor from Arizona State University) completed most of the project together. Experiences such as this – perhaps short term, but meaningful connections – could fill a book, as all of the Michiana potters are very well connected with the contemporary world of American ceramics. Yet it will suffice here to say that these additional professional connections – with people who are less present in everyday life, yet often still quite influential in the potter’s work – are worthy of acknowledgement and deserve further attention than will fit in this particular text.

In a less personal way, publications can also play a crucial role in the potter’s life. Many of the Michiana potters reference articles or books they have read over the years as strong influences in their development; often they have seen new aesthetic elements they wish to incorporate into their own work, have found new techniques to try, or have learned of potential solutions to problems through the extensive reading that they have all done. And, with the massive expansion of online resources, many are also turning to websites and social media for these kinds of resources, as well. Furthermore, many of the Michiana potters are published authors in their own right; many of their articles and other texts are cited throughout my own writing. Their publications, often in trade magazines that focus on the art of ceramics, ensure that their methods and philosophies are available to a wider audience in the ceramics world, and thus further facilitate their connections within this broader professional group. Still, it is those who are available nearby to provide support and collaborate on many aspects of the pottery process who have had the greatest influence on the development of a sense of community amongst the potters in Michiana.

Finding Balance and Looking Forward

The world is always changing for artists: families grow, new friendships develop or old friends move away, health challenges arise, business opportunities change, politics shift. Potters must remain relevant just as much as anyone, always reacting to new situations and shifting their work as necessary in order to continue their business into the future. In addition to the broad range of social connections at play in the Michiana potters' lives, another aspect of life that should be attended to is the wide range of career challenges that can arise throughout a potter's lifetime. While a sense of looking to the future may be epitomized in the wood firing process, it is also quite present in the everyday life of every potter; keeping an eye to the future and preparing for the road ahead is a constant consideration. Continually, a balance must be found between planning for the future and enjoying the present, between business and pleasure, collaborative work and individual control, maintaining old styles while seeking new inspirations, as many examples in my fieldwork have illustrated. Furthermore, new trials arise at different points in one's career; the startup challenges faced by a new potter are not the same as mid-career worries, nor later-life concerns.

I must acknowledge that I have not featured some of Michiana's newest or youngest artists in this text as much as I could, because my focus has been at the center of this complex network; those who are well established and thus well connected can speak at depth about the sense of community that they feel and have helped to develop. Yet a steady stream of students, assistants, or interns have been crucial for keeping the Michiana tradition alive and growing, at the schools, the guild, the production potteries, and the growing Michiana Pottery Tour, which has featured many of these new faces.⁵ Their perspectives are crucial, as they are the ones who have the ability to carry this tradition

⁵ See Appendix I for a list of participants. Furthermore, many of the recent assistants and interns at the Old Bag Factory and Justin Rothshank's studio, listed in Appendix II, are working to establish themselves as ceramic artists.

forward, should they choose to. Furthermore, their concerns are different than mid- or late-career artists, and some of those considerations have not been foregrounded in my research as much as they could be. For example, some young potters (such as Mark Goertzen's recent assistant Irena Gladun) speak of the challenge of balancing work and school responsibilities and time commitments, even when

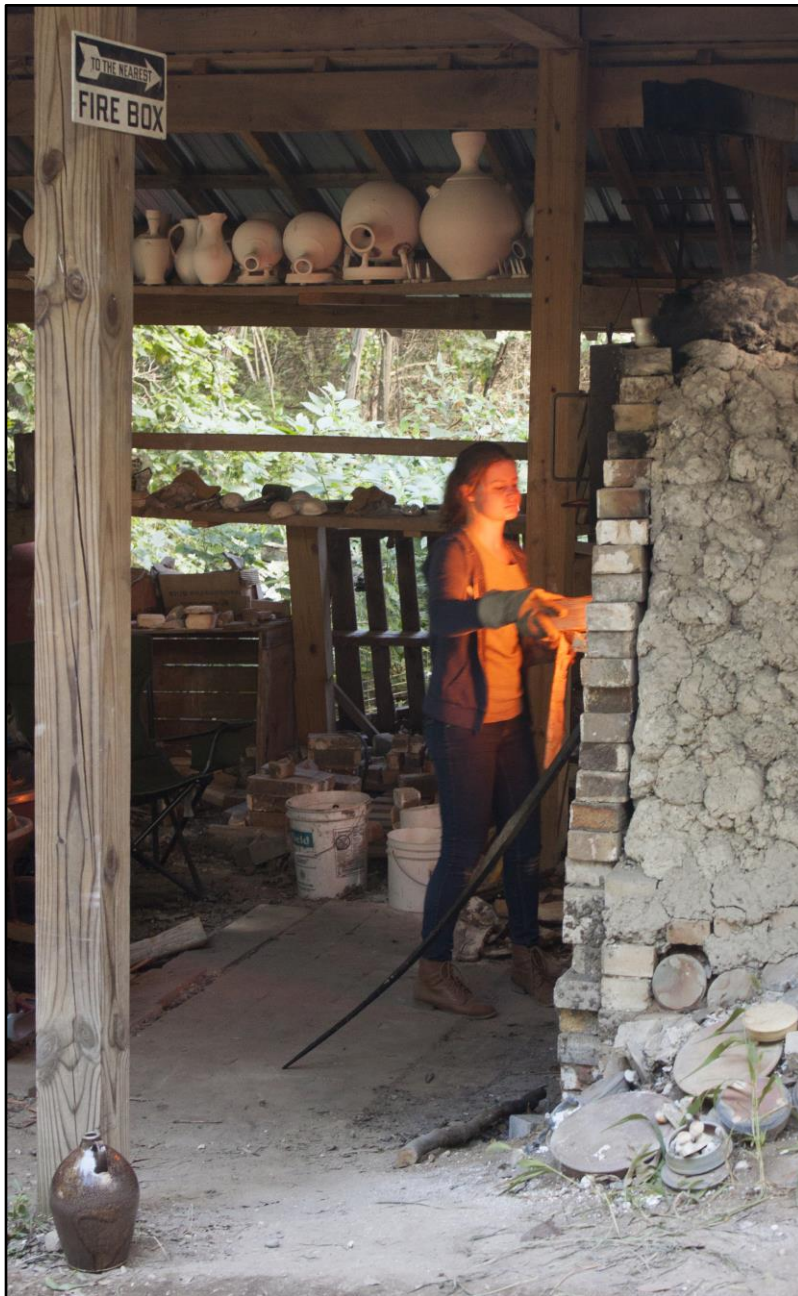


Figure 6.7 - Irena confidently stokes Mark's kiln during her second day on shift. August 2015.

they are excited to assist a more experienced artist as an intern or apprentice. Many say it is difficult to work in someone else's studio, either because it entails making pots that are a better fit with the owner's aesthetic, or because of the repetitious nature of production pottery, which can be particularly challenging at a stage when they want to be experimenting and giving more time to developing their own identifiable style in clay. Furthermore, others struggle to decide whether an artistic career is the right path, sometimes feeling a pull toward other professions with more financial certainty, or considering whether they want to give some portion of their time to teaching. Irena, for example, is actually attending Goshen College on a music scholarship, and has not yet decided what career path will fit best for her, whether it is music, art, or something entirely different.

Madeline Gerig is another of the younger potters currently working in Goshen. She was just finishing high school when I first met her at a firing of Justin Rothshank's kiln in 2013; she attended Bethany Christian High School and studied pottery with Eric Kauffman there. She then went on to study with Merrill Krabill at Goshen College starting in fall of 2013, and she interned with Justin Rothshank for part of 2015. An excerpt from the artist statement she has posted on her website illustrates how well her personal outlook on art fits with the rest of the Michiana group, when she says "My goal is to make simple, beautiful and accessible art that benefits my community..." (Gerig 2016). When I caught up with her more recently, at her booth at Moey Hart's location of the Michiana Pottery Tour in 2015, Maddie was slated to teach a course at Goshen Youth Arts (the facility started by Zach Tate and his wife) in the fall, and she was also planning to rent studio space there. Whether or not she will remain in Goshen long-term remains to be seen, but she is expecting to graduate from Goshen College in the spring of 2017, and I look forward to seeing what is next for her.

Brandon "Fuzzy" Schwartz is another emerging potter whom I've encountered on occasion at the Michiana Pottery Tours. In 2013, he spent the first day of the tour as a visitor, going to the many

different stops, and then on the second day, Sunday, he helped Dick Lehman with his sales at Mark Goertzen's location on the tour. It was there that I met Fuzzy for the first time, and learned that he was also a potter, and that he has an online blog where he sometimes writes about his experiences with pottery. Then, at the 2014 and 2015 tours, Fuzzy had his own booth at Moey Hart's location on the tour. I spoke with him at his booth in 2015, and he explained that although he has an art education degree and is currently teaching, he would like to consider the possibility of working full-time in clay someday. The 2015 tour was, in fact, full of younger potters hosted by those with established stops. For example, I mentioned above that Justin hosted Stephanie Galli and two others. Garrett DeLooze, from Maryland, also had a booth at Moey's location, and has interned with both Mark Goertzen and Justin Rothshank. Cindy Gibson, from Louisiana, has also interned with both Mark and Justin, and she was hosted by Mark during the 2015 tour. Both Garrett and Cindy were in Goshen specifically for the artistic opportunities available to them there, but when I spoke with them, neither had definitive plans for their futures. As Madeline, Fuzzy, Garrett, Cindy, and others (since these are by no means the only aspiring potters in Michiana, only the ones I've had an opportunity to chat with recently) continue their work, they will likely have many opportunities and thus many choices: at the very least they, like others before them, will have to decide whether they wish to stay in Michiana and thus part of this occupational group, or whether their needs and values will take them elsewhere, to pursue clay in a different region with a different set of supportive factors that may be, for some, a better fit.

Dick Lehman has spoken to this kind of choice and his own sense of commitment to Michiana when discussing a point in his own career when he and his family were tempted to move away. Ultimately, he says, "Instead of moving somewhere that had all that we imagined, we decided to commit ourselves to making our location one that was equally attractive. It was a small shift, but one with huge implications. Instead of investing energy in trying to find ways to leave this location, we invested in making our town, region, and local arts communities vibrant in their own ways"

(Hartenberger 2013). This navigation between new opportunities and established commitments is a lifelong one, which is reflected in the balance all production potters must find between continuing a predictable production line and expressing new ideas in unique, individual pieces, and between fulfilling their clients' desires and pursuing their own preferred aesthetics. In comparison to emerging artists, mid-career potters are particularly attuned to these kinds of challenges; while they may have established an identifiable style and a relatively stable list of clients, they must work hard to keep those clients engaged with their work, striking a balance between work that fits within the established aesthetic of their studio, and work that is new enough to garner new interest in their pottery. Furthermore, while they might enjoy the stability of an established business (in contrast with the challenge of starting and building a new business), staying in the studio and keeping up a high rate of production and sales can be physically challenging and exhausting, and it can be difficult to find time for a vacation when running a studio alone. Still, keeping up a steady rate of production is usually necessary to maintain a steady income and save for the future.

At many points in life, new benefits are balanced with new difficulties to overcome. After a lifetime of hard work in ceramics, some older potters have expressed feeling a new sense of creative freedom as they near (or enter) retirement. Those whose careers are well-established sometimes begin to feel that they have greater license to experiment with their work, particularly once they have both the assurance of a stable income from established clientele, and less pressing concerns with sustaining a long-term business operation. Older potters can also face different challenges, sometimes physical or medical, in trying to continue their work. For example, stress on one's hands, wrists, and back is usual in this profession, and can cause additional difficulties when compounded with later-life ailments such as arthritis. One potter I spoke with was pleased to be in good health, but expressed his concerns about remaining relevant; he was at a point where he was not being invited to as many exhibits as he had earlier in his career, and had recently received a more rejections than usual for articles he had written

and exhibitions he had entered. Although he was happy to know that he had built quite a legacy through the younger potters he had mentored over the years, he also wanted to keep making new and exciting work of his own, and he wasn't sure whether he was satisfied only making that work for his own benefit. "Is it enough to be able to do what I want?" he mused. In other words, while it can be invigorating to have more freedom, the work has little satisfaction without an audience to appreciate it. I suspect his audience was not so deaf to his efforts as he might have imagined in that moment, but his lack of confidence in how to move forward brings to light the fact that even an established artist's life is rarely simple or certain. What is certain is that all of the potters in Michiana whom I have met, no matter how old, are determined to keep making art for as long as they are physically able. Pottery is more than a career for them; it is a lifelong passion, and they thrive when they are able to share it with others.

Sense of Community and the Significance of Choice

"At work, the potter manages the transformation of nature, building culture while fulfilling the self, serving society, and patching the world together with pieces of clay that connect the past with the present, the useful with the beautiful, the material with the spiritual. The one who can do all that does enough. The potter has won the right to confidence" (Glassie 1999, 116). Glassie's words are a fitting tribute to the potters of the world who are able to maintain a balance in all of the complex factors in their lives, whose dedication affords them a steady career in clay. In Michiana, we find that most do so not only through dedication to developing their skill in work, but also through dedication to maintaining the social relationships that provide critical sustenance for that work.

Why should we attend to these social relationships between artists? In part, because the depth of knowledge and complex network of interpersonal connections that it reveals pushes back against the historical conception of the naive or anonymous folk artist, Yanagi's unknown craftsman. But more importantly, in developing a deeper understanding of tradition and creativity, we need to acknowledge

the myriad complex relationships that influence an artists' everyday life; an artist relies upon more than just one or two notable teachers to develop their identity and skill as an artist. As the preceding chapters have demonstrated, there are numerous connections that can play a key role in the development of a sense of shared identity among artists: commitment to living in a particular region with the right resources and, more importantly, likeminded people; time spent developing vocational habitus in shared learning spaces; participating in collaborative production methods and developing empathy through liminal experiences; the collection and exchange of objects as resources for social and professional development. All of these aspects have helped to form the basis of the artistic community in Michiana, and to a greater or lesser degree, each is crucial to the success of every individual within the group. Furthermore, this study suggests that an investigation into similar aspects of other occupational groups could help scholars working with contemporary artists to better understand the kind of collaborative environment that facilitates creativity and positive feelings about work.

In the introduction to this dissertation, I noted the interrelationship between the notions of art world, network, community, and group. Becker's conception of an art world as a network ([1982] 2008) has been an important guide throughout this study, and Noyes' distinctions between networks, communities, and groups provides clarity to the understanding that a community is not the direct correlative of a network (1995, 452). In many ways I have been engaged in tracing social networks in Michiana; connections between artists of varying locales, media, and professional levels, between artists and those who support them, and through objects that act as intermediaries between artists. These connections are concrete, their interactions observable, and yet documentation of a network is not fully representative of the "sense of community" that so many potters in Michiana speak of. Community, as Noyes says, emerges in performance, in interaction, and networks only exist so long as those connections are continually invoked and revitalized (1995, 471-2). It is at this theoretical turn that I assert, time and again throughout this text, that presence matters.

In elucidating the details of social connections in Michiana, I have demonstrated that a sense of vocationally-oriented community can be found among professionals who connect both within and outside of their workplaces. While daily interactions (such as sharing resources like materials and equipment while working in the same studio) help in building these connections, there are also certain times throughout the year that, while occurring less often, are crucial for community building. When it is time to build and fire kilns together, when striving to learn new skills or to collaborate on making a unique pot, or when working towards the development of a pottery tour which enables every potter in the area to meet more potential clients – in these vital situations, other artists who are present in the same region are the most crucial support system that a potter can have. Their proximity means they can choose to encounter and support one another easily, both professionally and through other shared hobbies. The sense of community they speak of develops out of the fact that they take pleasure in the same activities, find frustration in some of the same aspects of their lives, and because they support one another in these endeavors and are in dialogue with one another about these values.

Furthermore, I have shown that these dialogs are not limited to speech and text. Embodied experiences do not need to be discussed to elicit a shared understanding of the experience; pottery involves hard, physical labor, and having physical knowledge of the craft means understanding the challenges that other craftspeople endure. While wood firing necessitates much verbal communication about the technical considerations of the process, stepping up to the fire and feeding the flames provides a sensual knowledge of the labor and danger entailed, and it is an intuitive leap to know that others who stoke the kiln feel the same rush of heat. And, the emotional states that are shared during the liminal experience of firing go above and beyond what might be verbally communicated. Also, the sharing of objects – through communal making, and exchange – contributes to a shared aesthetic, both visually and tactilely. While pottery is a constant source of conversation, feeling the clay, holding a pot, and experiencing the use of a functional object all entail tactile knowledge that cannot be completely

communicated through words. The feeling of these physical experiences is as important as the teacher who says “this is good work,” and discusses qualities of weight, balance, form, texture, and more.

In chapter one, I posed the following: given that a single artist can achieve tremendous recognition and artistic success as an individual, what can he or she achieve through a myriad of connections with other artists, particularly those working in the same medium? Among the Michiana potters, it is clear that the answer lies in the satisfaction they find in teaching, serving their community, and working collaboratively, as well as the ability to pursue wood firing aesthetics that would be challenging to achieve without the help of others. Furthermore, there is great satisfaction in knowing they are surrounded by others who understand the values that they hold. Together, they find individual artistic success, and they are also able to work together to develop recognition for the arts in their region, which provides a lifestyle they appreciate as well as an expanded customer base.

I began this dissertation speaking of serendipity in my own life, and I know that many similarly fortuitous connections have played a role in the lives of all of the Michiana potters, bringing them into contact with the right people, and the right opportunities, at the right moments for all to fall into place. Yet I would not presume to call the development of the Michiana Aesthetic the result of accident or serendipity. It is the clear result of conscious choices made by a group of professionals who are happy to benefit from working near and with one another. They have chosen to stay in or move to a region that fits their needs, both with physical resources and likeminded people, and they have chosen to do all they can to help that place live up to the potential that they see in it. They have chosen to take part in educational opportunities that fit with their own established values, and also to provide education to others, expressing that which they feel is best within themselves. They have chosen to work collaboratively together, in their studios, on single projects, or at a wood firing, appreciating the aesthetic values they hold in common and striving together to bring those ideals into reality. They have

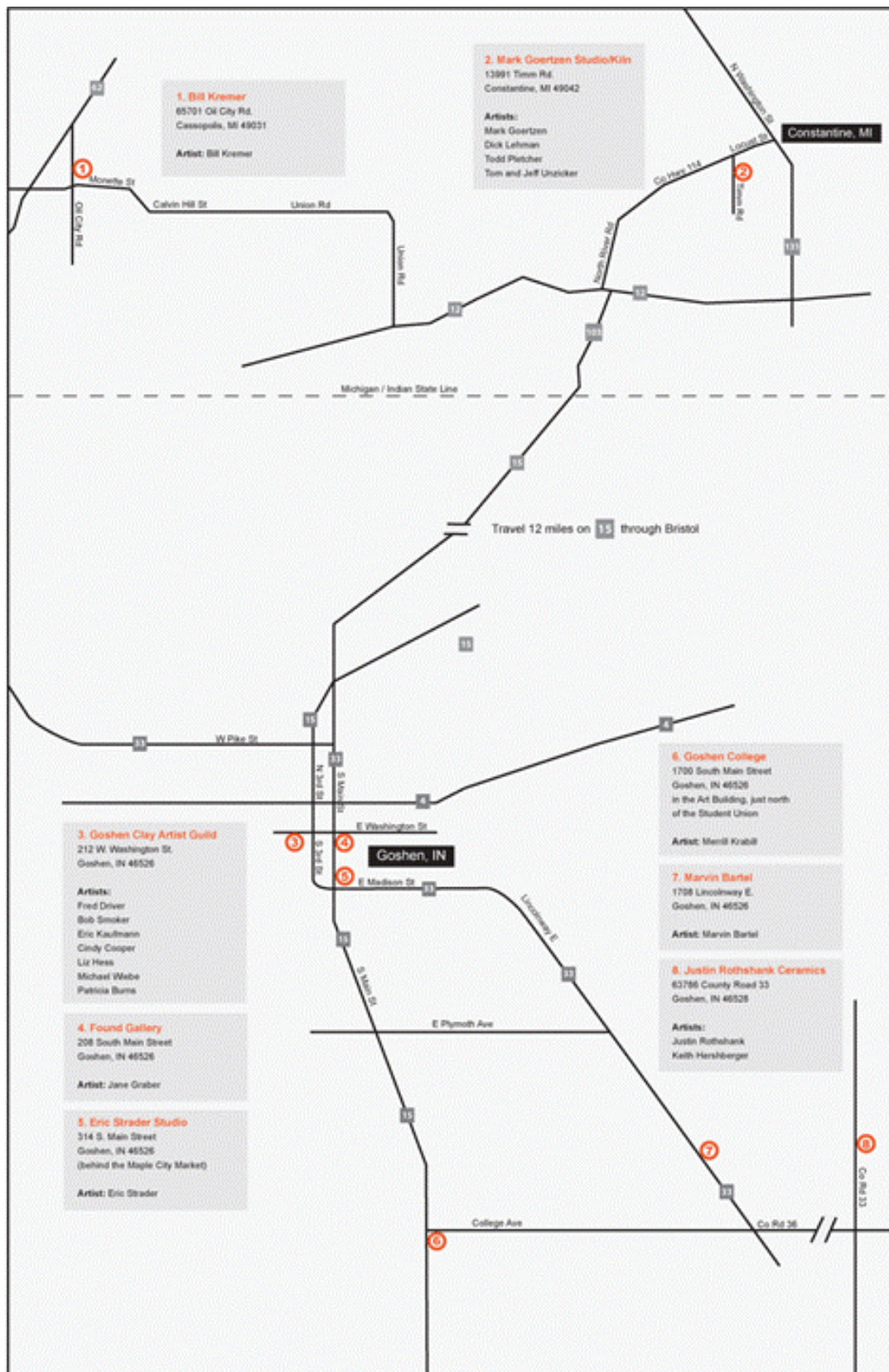
chosen to exchange gifts, to collect one another's work, and to hold dear those objects that evoke the most meaningful memories of the people and experiences that inspire them. It is through these choices that such a strong sense of community among potters in Michiana has developed, and it will be through the choices of others who join them that this emerging tradition will continue to grow into the future.

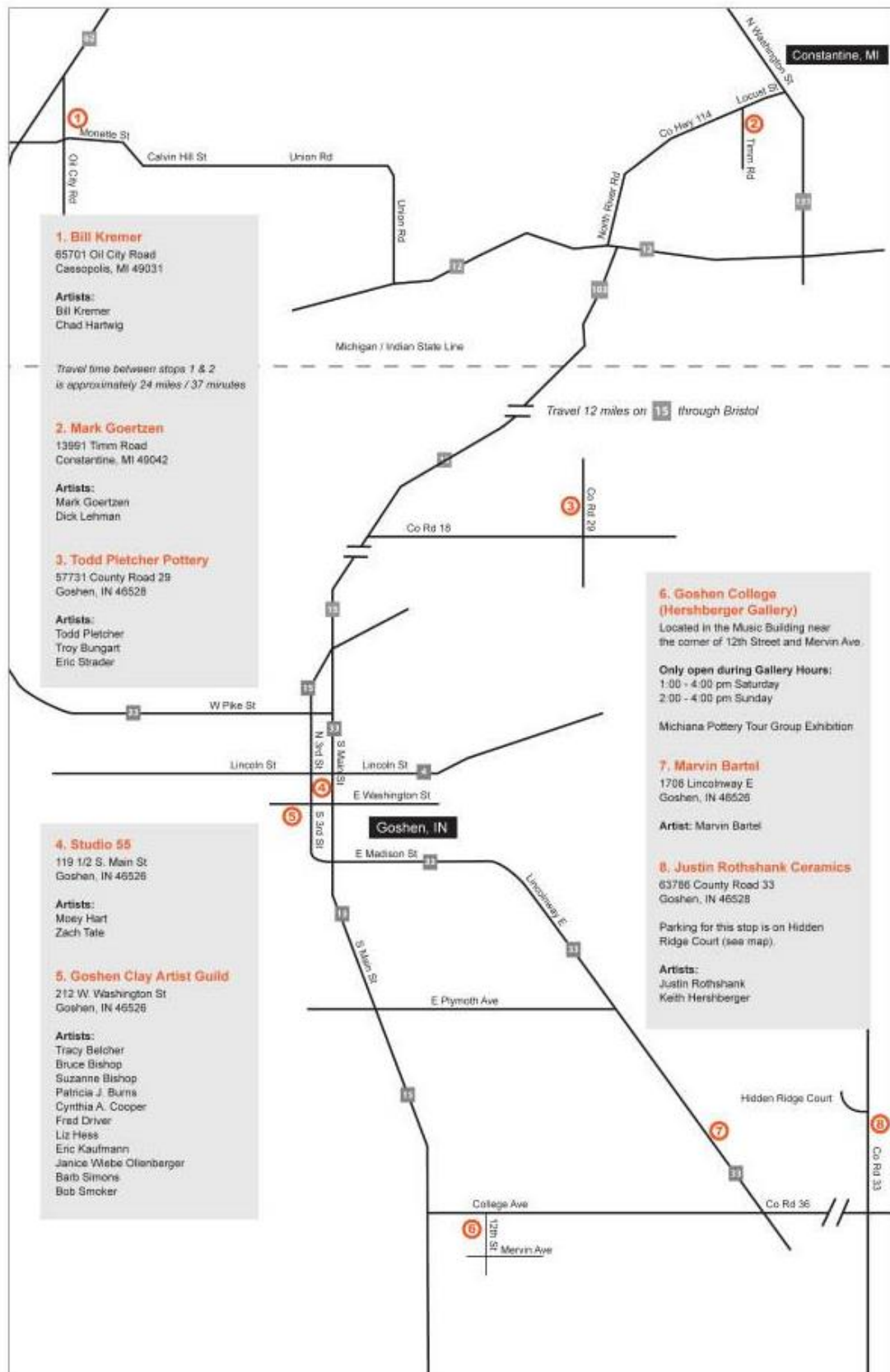


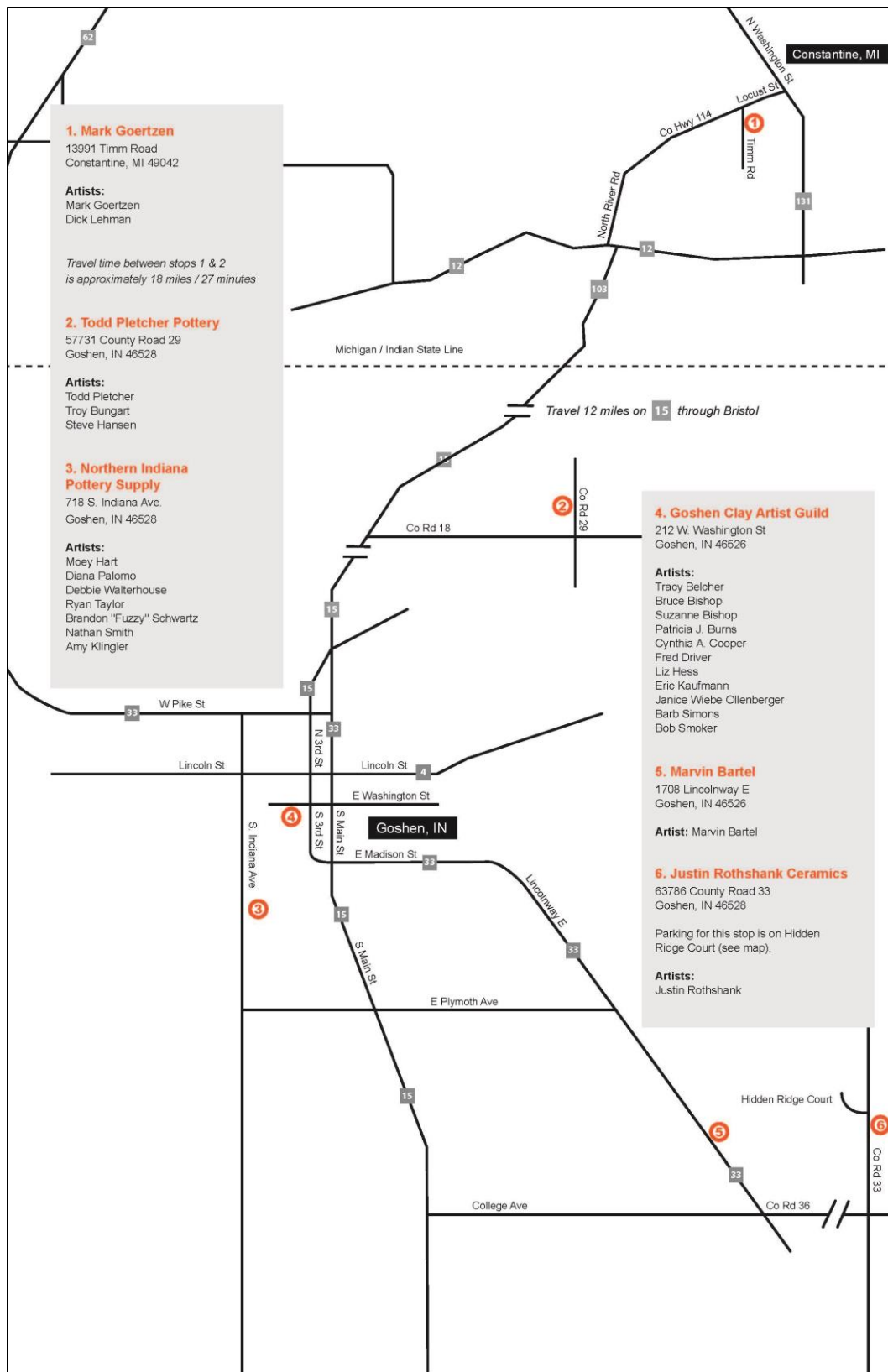
Figure 6.8 - The many potters who participated in firing Mark Goertzen's kiln in summer 2013 pose in front of the kiln, each holding one of their recently-finished pots. Top row (left to right): Royce Hildebrand, Todd Pletcher, Mark Goertzen, Scott Lehman, Anna Corona. Bottom row (left to right): Todd Leech, Stephanie Craig, Dick Lehman, Bill Hunt. July 2013.

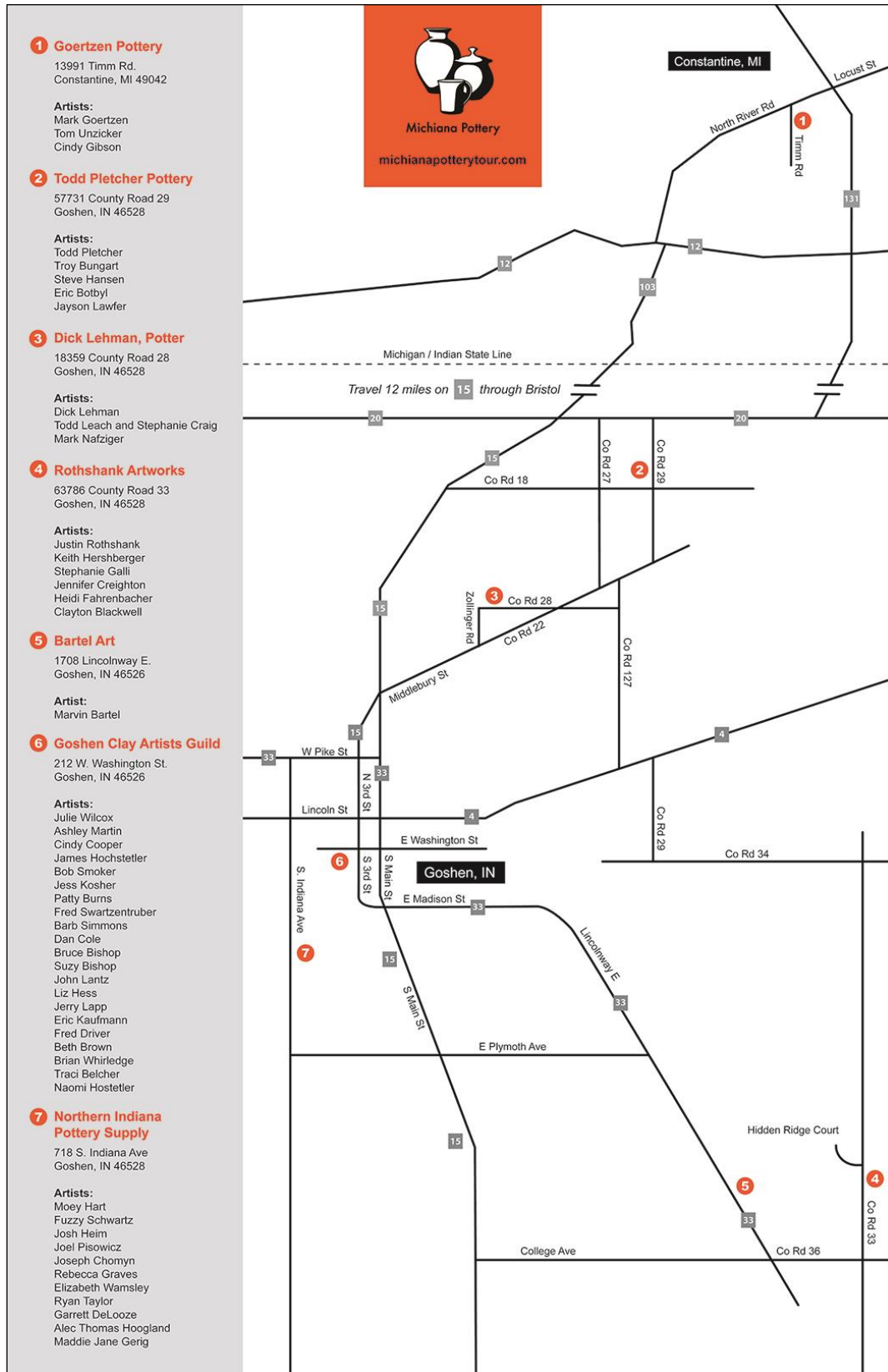
Appendix I - Michiana Pottery Tour Maps

The maps on the following pages show the locations and artists featured in the 2012 through 2015 Michiana Pottery Tours. It is possible that some maps may not reflect minimal last-minute changes to the lineup at each location; in any case, these are the maps that were provided to visitors via the Michiana Pottery Tour website and sometimes also in printed form at locations around the tour.









Appendix II – Assistants, Apprentices, and/or Interns

Dick Lehman's Assistants at the Old Bag Factory (through 2010)

David Gamber
Norma Wysong
Mark Goertzen
Greg Stahly
Todd Pletcher
Barry Carpenter
Tom Unzicker
Jeff Unzicker
Eric Strader
Peter Olsen
Lane Kaufmann
Moshe Hodges

Mark Goertzen's Assistants at the Old Bag Factory (2010-2015)

Moshe Hodges
Faith Day
Royce Hilderbrand
Cindy Gibson
Irina Gladun

Note: the above lists, provided by Dick and Mark, are limited to those who worked for significant periods of time at the studio and who have stayed in the field of ceramics. Paul Roten, Loren Beidler, and Levi Kropf were also employed for a notable amount of time, but went on to careers in other fields.

Justin Rothshank's Interns / Resident Artists

2015 - Sadie Misiuk

Garrett DeLooze

Cindy Gibson

Caleb Longenecker

Maddie Gerig

2014 - Jamie Morrow

Mark Tarabula

2013 - Rebecca Krofcheck

2012 - Meghan Borland

2011 - Ryan Taylor

2010 - Craig Hartenberger

Zach Tate

Note: most residents have worked with Justin between 3 months and one year. The internships he offers are typically unpaid, and interns often find a part-time job elsewhere in town while they work with Justin. Further information about the opportunities he provides can be found on his website: <http://rothshank.com/contact/residencies/>.

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Education

- | | | |
|-------------|--|--|
| 2016 | Doctor of Philosophy, Folklore
Ph.D. Minor in Art History | Indiana University , Bloomington, Indiana |
| 2014 | Master of Arts, Folklore
Concentration in Public Practice | Indiana University , Bloomington, Indiana |
| 2007 | Bachelor of Fine Arts, Ceramics
Bachelor of Arts, Japanese
Minor in Asian Studies
Honors diploma, Magna cum laude | Ball State University , Muncie, Indiana |

Professional Experience

Communications and Projects Manager

Institute for Advanced Study, Indiana University, 2016

Graduate Assistant, Traditional Arts Indiana

Mathers Museum of World Cultures, Indiana University, 2015-2016

Associate Instructor: "Critical Reading for New College Students"

Student Academic Center, Indiana University, 2015

Graduate Assistant in Asian Art

Indiana University Art Museum, 2014-2015

Associate Instructor: "Introduction to Folklore in the United States" and "World Arts and Cultures"

Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology, Indiana University, 2012 –2014

Student Services Coordinator

Office of Overseas Study, Indiana University, 2010 –2012

Administrative Assistant

Foster International Living Learning Center, Indiana University, 2008 –2010

Advising Assistant

Honors College, Ball State University, 2006 –2007

Office Assistant

Center for Middletown Studies, Ball State University, 2003 – 2007

Selected Projects

- Exhibits:**
- 2016** **Indiana Folk Art: 200 Years of Tradition and Innovation**
Research and Curatorial Assistant, Indiana Bicentennial Exhibit
- 2013** **Melted Ash: Michiana Wood Fired Pottery**
Guest Curator, Mathers Museum of World Cultures, Indiana University
- Beyond Melted Ash: Michiana Wood Fired Pottery (online)**
Digital Curator, Traditional Arts Indiana website, Indiana University
- Conferences:**
- 2017** **Conference on the Future of American Folklore**
Exhibitions Chairperson, Planning Committee
- 2015** **Indiana University and The Ohio State University**
Annual Folklore and Ethnomusicology Graduate Student Conference
Co-Chair, Planning Committee
- 2013** **Stoking the Fire: A Contemporary Pottery Symposium**
Primary Organizer
- Indiana University and The Ohio State University**
Annual Folklore and Ethnomusicology Graduate Student Conference
Graphic Designer and Planning Committee Member
- Design:**
- 2016** **Indiana Folk Art: 200 Years of Tradition and Innovation**
76 page book, print and digital editions
- American Folklore Society 2015 Annual Report**
45 page digital publication
- USA International Harp Competition**
76 page program booklet, print and digital editions

Publications

"Folk Art Summit." 2016. In *Indiana Folk Art: 200 Years of Tradition and Innovation*. Bloomington: Mathers Museum of World Cultures.

"The Temptation to Touch: Considerations in Curating Pottery Exhibits." 2014. *NCECA Journal*, vol. 35: 116-117.

"Try It and See." 2014. *The Good of Goshen* website. <http://goodofgoshen.com/project/try-it-and-see/>.

Book review: *Celtic Threads: A Journey in Cape Breton Crafts*, by Eveline MacLeod and Daniel W. MacInnes. 2014. *Journal of Folklore Research Reviews*.

Guest Lectures, Workshops, and Conference Presentations

- 2016** **"Developing Vocational Habitus: Narratives of Joining an Occupational Group"**
American Folklore Society, Annual Meeting in Miami, FL
- Roundtable: "Female Bodies in the Field"**
The Ohio State University and Indiana University Folklore and Ethnomusicology Conference
- 2015** **"Reading Gestures: Intersections of Potters' Folk Beliefs and Neuroscience"**
American Folklore Society, Annual Meeting in Long Beach, CA
- "'Framing' Rookwood: Visual and Rhetorical Framing of American Art Pottery within the Late 19th Century Fine Art World"**
Indiana University and The Ohio State University Folklore and Ethnomusicology Conference
- 2014** **"Sustaining Craft: The Role of Wood Firing in the Development of the Michiana Aesthetic"**
American Folklore Society, Annual Meeting in Santa Fe, NM
- "The Temptation to Touch: Considerations in Curating Pottery Exhibits"**
National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts, Annual Conference in Milwaukee, WI
- "Mirroring and Remastering in Potter-Customer Interactions"**
The Ohio State University and Indiana University Folklore and Ethnomusicology Conference
- 2013** **Guest Lecture: "Michiana Wood Fired Pottery"**
United States Folklore course, Indiana University – Bloomington, IN
- Guest Lecture: "Wood Fired Pottery and Kiln Openings"**
Indiana Folklore course, Indiana University – Bloomington, IN
- "Making Melted Ash: Comments from the Curator"**
Stoking the Fire: A Contemporary Pottery Symposium, Bloomington, IN
- Guest Lecture: "Raku Pottery in Japan and America"**
Introductory Folklore course, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis, IN
- 2012** **Guest Lectures: "Indiana Wood Fired Pottery" and "Raku Pottery: From Japan to America"**
United States Folklore courses, Indiana University – Bloomington, IN
- 2011** **Visiting Artist Lecture and Raku Workshop**
Ceramics Department, Ball State University, Muncie, IN
- 2010** **Raku Workshop**
Bloomington Clay Studio, Bloomington, IN
- Visiting Artist Lecture and Raku Workshop**
Ceramics Department, Ball State University, Muncie, IN

Academic Honors and Awards

Distinguished Service Award, Indiana University Department of Folklore (2015)

Warren E. Roberts Paper Prize, American Folklore Society, Folk Arts Section (2014)

Artist-in-Residence, Shigaraki Ceramic Cultural Park (2008)

Sponsored by the National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts

Modern Languages and Classics Scholarship, Ball State University (2005)

Presidential Scholarship, Ball State University (2003)

National Merit Scholar (2003)

Service to the Community and to the University

Indiana University Folklore Student Association

President, 2014 - 2015; secretary & webmaster, 2013 - 2014; member, 2011 - 2016

Quarryland Men's Chorus

Graphic design and event photography, 2013 - 2016

Bloomington Community Art Fair

Planning committee member and graphic designer, 2013 - 2014

Habitat for Humanity ReStore

Volunteer, Mission Wall painting project, 2013

Foster International Living-Learning Center

Advisory Board member, 2010-2012

Selected Art Exhibitions

Hoosier Artist Gallery, gallery member and featured artist, Nashville, Indiana, 2014-2015

Darn Good Art, Individual Exhibition, Darn Good Soup gallery, Bloomington, Indiana, 2013 & 2014

Synthesis: NCECA International Resident Artists, NCECA Annual Conference, Phoenix, Arizona, 2009

Minnetrista Annual Juried Art Show, Muncie, Indiana, 2009

Open Space: Art About the Land, Minnetrista, Muncie, Indiana, 2007

3-D Merit Award for *Blossoms Bring Storms*

Raku: Traditions and Innovations, B.F.A. Thesis Exhibition, Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana, 2007

17th Annual Juried Art Show, Minnetrista, Muncie, Indiana, 2007

Merit Award for *Pit Pitcher #3*

Institutional Art, Ball State University Student Art Gallery, Muncie, Indiana, 2006

Best 3-D Award for *Pit Pitcher #2*

71st Annual Student Show, Ball State University Museum of Art, Muncie, Indiana, 2006

Undergraduate Ceramics Guild Award for *Happy Accident*